

In Firmer Chains, Our Hearts Confine

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by [orphan_account](#)

Summary

Former musical composer and current writer Gerard Way is a sensation of the musical and literary scenes of 1800s London. But after struggling for ages with his new book, he's close to giving up. Until he receives an offer from Grant Morrison himself; to go to his manor in Scotland and work on his novel in peace. Gerard seizes upon the chance immediately. Grant, however, has a dark secret he's desperately trying to keep hidden. And Gerard has a few of his own.

Notes

Warning - This work is not going to be historically accurate by any means but I will do my best to at least try to stay inside the lines. Though liberties will definitely be taken. Like, a lot.

Title comes from a poem with the rather long name of, "To a Lady who Presented to the Author a Lock of Hair Braided with his own, and appointed a Night in December to meet him in the Garden" by Byron. I remembered the line but it took me forever to find the poem itself. I highly recommend it.

This story was started back in either 2011 or 2012, and completed it in 2017. I have been working on it a LONG time. So for the acknowledgements.

To [akamine_chan](#), for reading what I had and telling me not to give up, and doing beta on the first few pages.

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To [tuesdaysgone](#), [fleurdeliser](#), [jjtaylor](#), and [wordslinging](#) for inspiring this in the first place.

Last but not least, [winterlover](#) has done a beautiful piece for this fic. Which can be found [here](#)

Gerard was early for his meeting at the publisher's office. He wasn't quite sure what about. His draft had been submitted perfectly on time, and normally if his editors Mr. DiDio or Mr. Lee wished to complain about his manuscript, they would do so via telegram or send a letter. This was a bit unusual. Even more unusual was the late hour; Gerard had been forced to reschedule a dinner engagement as he was to be at the office promptly at 7 o'clock in the evening. The hour was almost unseemly, but he did not mind.

He was forced to wait, though, as when he arrived, the secretary told him, "They are still engaged in a meeting, Mr. Way. However, they should be done shortly. Please, have a seat." Gerard sighed and did so.

"Thank you, Mr. Jones."

He'd been forced to cut his grooming short because of the abrupt summons to DiDio and Lee's offices; his black hair had not been completely tamed by the cream, and was curling around his ears in a ridiculous way.

It had grown just past his collar, and normally at home he would not fuss with it, letting it remain in its shaggy, natural state. Yet for this meeting, he wanted to be more presentable, so he'd slicked it back with some Brilliantine. He looked younger this way, and his amber eyes had looked ridiculously large in the antique mirror in his bedroom. Altogether, it was not an unpleasant effect, but Gerard was not fond of it.

He reflected that he could be at home now, working on his third novel, or perhaps even out with his friends at the Demeter Club—though, Gerard did not go out much these days, what with his brother's situation.

He jolted a bit when the door to the offices in back crashed open, and he heard laughter. Mr. Lee came out with a bald man Gerard hadn't seen before, and he was chuckling as the man said, "And honestly, that's how she got there!"

Gerard was struck by the severity of the unknown man's appearance. Dark clothing, tinted glasses, and no hair to speak of with the exception of his eyebrows and, Gerard assumed, eyelashes. Gerard felt drawn to him almost immediately.

Mr. Lee was still laughing and he shook his head. "You always have the strangest stories from when you travel abroad, Grant." He glanced around the room and, spotting Gerard, said, "Ah, Mr. Way! I apologize for being late, I was simply catching up with Mr. Morrison here." He paused. "Have you two met?"

"I am quite certain I haven't had the pleasure," the stranger replied.

Mr. Lee gestured for Gerard to come closer, which of course he did. He was intrigued by the stranger. "Mr. Gerard Way, this is Mr. Grant Morrison. Mr. Way is responsible for that strange but wonderfully selling book *The Parasol School*. I'm sure you know Grant's work, Mr. Way."

Gerard abruptly felt hot under the collar. He was sure that his cheeks were red, as Gerard would blush frequently. This was *the* Grant Morrison! It took everything he had to keep himself from stumbling over his words. "Yes, of course! Mr. Morrison! I quite enjoyed *Despair Garrison*, along with *the Unseeable* series. And of course *the Dark Inspector at Bedlam* is still one of my favorites." He held his hand out, and Mr. Morrison accepted, shaking Gerard's hand.

"Why thank you," he replied. "I'm familiar with *the Parasol School*; it was delightful. Mr. Lee tells me you have a new book coming soon?"

Gerard managed to keep his outward appearances sophisticated, though he wanted to swallow his own tongue. He wasn't sure how well he succeeded, but likely not well. He was buzzing with energy, and he frequently would fidget when he was nervous. "Yes! *The Marvelous Malcontents*. I'm working on it this very moment actually."

"I look forward to seeing it. And *The Parasol School* sequel," Mr. Morrison replied with a wink. He turned to Mr. Lee. "I would love to stay, but I must dash, James. I look forward to seeing you again."

Then he was gone. Gerard still felt breathless. However, Mr. Lee ushered him into his office for their own meeting, which admittedly would have been far more productive if Gerard had been able to shift his thoughts away from Mr. Morrison. He had been perfectly polite; and yet, being in the presence of someone he admired for so long had been taxing. Gerard felt both blissful and anxious, convinced that he had somehow embarrassed himself.

"Mr. Way," interrupted Mr. Lee, "Are you quite all right?"

Gerard mentally shook himself. “My apologies. I am somewhat distracted.”

Mr. Lee had a knowing smile on his face. “Could it be due to a certain Scottish writer?”

“You know me far too well,” he admitted, his smile sheepish.

“I have the pleasure of counting Grant among my closest friends,” Mr. Lee said. “It would benefit you to speak with him further.”

Gerard struggled to say something. He felt as though he were going to choke on his own tongue at the prospect. “I am quite certain that you’re right. Though it may not be to Mr. Morrison’s benefit.”

Mr. Lee said nothing more on the subject, instead returning to the task at hand; the final draft of the second Parasol School novel and the first manuscript for the Marvelous Malcontents. He gently reminded Gerard that the due date for the former was swiftly approaching, and offered to help with any issues he was having. Gerard was grateful for the assistance, and mentioned a few areas with which he struggled.

They talked for another hour, about possible plot points and characters. But it felt to Gerard as though he were ramming his head against a wall. He was relieved when Mr. Lee drew the meeting to a close, again reminding him to have the new manuscript due on time.

“I’ll have it done soon,” Gerard promised.

“See that you do, I don’t like delays.” There was a warning tone in his voice.

“Of course. Will that be all?”

“Yes. Have a pleasant evening, Mr. Way.”

“And you as well, sir.” He left the office, and hailed a handsom cab.

Gerard, of course, had to tell someone of his meeting. He could barely contain his excitement once he was on the street. It was late, but not so terribly late that he couldn’t call on a friend. It was Tuesday, which meant that Becky would be holding her bi-weekly meeting of fellow minds at the Demeter Club.

When he arrived, he found there were fewer guests than usual, and he was easily able to locate her. She was a petite woman, but with her

bright red hair and sunny smile she stood out in any crowd. "Mr. Way! And what brings you out this evening?"

"A rather unprecedented event, Miss Cloonan," he replied.

"Then you must tell us all about it. The twins are here, and I'm certain they will wish to hear," she said to him. She led him from the main room to a private parlor, where indeed the twins and others of his circle of friends had congregated.

Gabriel and Fabio were seated, telling what seemed to be an involved but hilarious story. Their dark good looks Gerard would recognize anywhere. Seated with them was Ray Toro, and Gerard beamed when he saw him.

"Toro! It's been an age!" he exclaimed, taking a seat next to him. His friend looked much the same, though his hair was longer and seemed even more unruly. It wasn't fashionable, but the chestnut waves framing his face suited him. "How are you?"

"Wonderful, Way, wonderful," Ray replied, shaking his hand, brown eyes warm and fond. Gerard nearly sighed in relief at that. He had missed Ray dearly.

"Has it been so long that you're 'Way' and 'Toro' now?" Becky teased, sitting beside Fabio.

Gerard felt himself relax at the gentle teasing. "Oh come now, I've been busy!"

"Writing the next avant garde novel that will take London by storm?" Gabriel asked.

"Or perhaps getting into more trouble." Fabio added.

"Oh, they grow up so fast! Soon he'll be too good to speak with us in public, and we'll be too polite and worried about our reputations to associate with such a scoundrel!"

Gerard rolled his eyes. "Will you continue speaking, or may I tell everyone who I met tonight at Mr. Lee's office?"

"Please, do go on," Fabio said as he and Gabriel leaned closer. "We're all a quiver!"

Ray looked at the two and placed a finger over his lips, asking for

quiet. He then said, "Yes, please tell us, Gerard." His tone was sincere, rather than the gentle mocking of the twins.

Gerard took a deep breath, then said, "Mr. Grant Morrison." The reactions were exactly as he expected.

Becky squealed with excitement, while the twins swore with disbelief. One laughed and the other cursed Gerard's good fortune, and Ray smiled and squeezed Gerard's shoulder.

"So were you able to speak or did you stutter like an imbecile?" Gabriel asked.

"I was collected, though perhaps a bit warmer than I intended to be when addressing him. It was once he left I found myself to be weak in the knees."

"What's he like?" Becky asked.

"Soft spoken, very polite. He said he enjoyed *The Parasol School*," he admitted and the twins clapped him on the back.

"How could he not?" Ray asked. "As you know, I'm not overly fond of the written word but even I was won over by *The Parasol School*."

"That's because Gerard listened to you and Frank play while he wrote it. Pure vanity!" Fabio teased Ray.

Becky shook her head, then asked, "Do you think you'll meet him again?"

"I don't know," said Gerard. "Mr. Lee said I would benefit from speaking with him, but I'm not sure my correspondence would be cordial."

"The introductions have been made," Ray pointed out. "If you wished to write to him, or arrange another meeting, it would be allowed."

"I doubt very much Mr. Morrison stands on protocol," Gabriel said, winking at his brother who laughed in turn.

"What does that mean?" Gerard asked.

"Nothing, they're being gossiping gooses yet again," Becky told him, and gave the twins a cutting look.

Gerard was a bit puzzled, but the twins looked contrite so he did not

pursue the matter further. "I don't feel right in writing to him."

"Don't feel pressured to," Becky advised. "But also don't feel as though you are unworthy of Mr. Morrison's company. He is a peer of yours, and there would be nothing strange in wishing to get to know him."

"He didn't invite further communication," Gerard said, and even to him it sounded weak.

"Now that is surprising." Fabio grinned at Gabriel, and it looked as though he were going to say more, but he didn't. Gerard thought Becky or Ray might have trod on his foot under the table.

"I'm sure that your brother would be most pleased to hear this news?" Ray asked, attempting to change the subject.

But at the mention of his brother, Gerard's heart seemed to stop. He carefully schooled his expression, and said in a cold tone, "Quite."

Becky, Ray, Fabio and Gabriel exchanged glances, but Ray didn't try to press the topic.

Suddenly feeling fatigued, Gerard stood and said, "I must depart. Have a pleasant evening."

"You as well," Becky replied.

"I may call on you next week," Ray added.

When Gerard arrived home, he was relieved to see Worm had retired for the evening. Likely, Frank had relieved him. He slipped out of his hat and coat, then fetched a lamp from the window sill. He lit it with a match, and ascended the stairs.

He could see a light coming from his brother's room, and made his way there. Mikey was in bed, Frank reading a book aloud from a chair nearby. He stopped and looked up when Gerard entered the room.

"How is he?" Gerard asked, placing the lamp on a table.

"Better, though delusions still grasp him at times. He was taken ill today," Frank replied, his tone hushed. "I was reading to him, I thought it might soothe his mind."

He sat on the edge of the bed, taking Mikey's hand into his own. The younger Way didn't respond, but Gerard had expected as much. "Has he eaten at all?"

"Some stew and bread, he kept it down though he was nauseous for some time."

Gerard brushed Mikey's dark hair out of his face, and Mikey sighed. "Gee?"

"I'm here, Mikey."

"Good day?" He asked, eyes opening. They were the same amber color as Gerard's. The two were similar in appearance, but Mikey was taller and much more slim.

"Yes. It was a lovely day," said Gerard. He hesitated, but decided not to tell Mikey about Mr. Morrison. At least not yet. "Everyone at the Demeter says hello, Ray was there."

"You didn't--"

"They know nothing, you needn't worry."

Mikey gave a small, sleepy smile before his eyes closed again. Frank marked his place in the book and set it aside, rising from his chair. Gerard followed him out of the room after reclaiming his lamp.

"How long will you continue with this fiction?" Frank asked as they headed for Gerard's rooms.

"As long as he needs me to."

"If he were in his right mind he would not allow you to make yourself the villain in order to maintain his reputation!" Frank insisted.

Gerard drew himself to his full height, and hissed, "I swore no one would know of his illness! And if I must paint myself a cad to do so then so I shall!"

"I don't know if I'm more angry at you for destroying yourself or Miss Simmons for abandoning us," Frank stated, his tone weary.

"She didn't abandon us, Mikey drove her away," he pointed out, tone just as weary as Frank's.

They entered Gerard's rooms, and he flopped into a chair in the

parlor. Frank clicked his tongue in a disapproving tone and said, "Worm will have a fit if he finds you like this."

"I shall never be a proper gentleman, Frank. And the sooner all around me accept this, the more content we will all be." Gerard sighed again.

Frank sat in another chair. "Mikey is healing. The ghosts haunt him something awful, but he's doing better. I do not remember your recovery from opium going quite so poorly."

"My entanglement with that accursed drug was much shorter, and I had more help," Gerard pointed out. His face darkened as he added, "It would have served me right if I'd had none at all."

Frank looked hesitant, but he asked, "Perhaps Mr. DiCosimo could be of assistance to Mikey?"

"Absolutely not!" Gerard spat, sitting up. "He will not come within ten miles of my brother, and you are to keep away from Mr. DiCosimo as well! He is far more trouble than he is worth and I won't have you two entangled with him."

"He helped you!"

"And I paid a heavy price for that help! One I hope to heaven Mikey will never pay!"

"He is suffering! He recovers, but if we could speed the process along we should consider it!" Frank was on his feet now, and his expression was thunderous. His sage green eyes were practically glowing with anger, his black hair wild.

Gerard didn't rise. Instead, he took a deep breath, attempting to calm himself. "I know you have a great affection for him. That you love him more than anything. But please, believe me when I say the cure is worse than the disease."

"If you would tell me what this cure is, perhaps I would take that into consideration before asking," Frank said acidly.

"You would think less of me were I to tell you, and likely conclude I am a monster. You're a dear friend, Frank, and your disgust would wound me. But if you were to turn that disgust to Mikey, I couldn't live with myself." Frank looked ready to protest, and Gerard held up his hand. "I know you. You would want him to take the cure to end

his suffering, but once he was recovered you would never look at him the same. And that is worse than any opium ghosts, I promise you.”

“I wish you would tell me,” Frank replied. “You’re my brother too, Gerard. You haven’t done something illegal have you?”

Gerard shook his head. “No, I promise you it was perfectly legal, and no one died. But I’m not proud of it and I won’t let Mikey go through the same thing.”

Frank went to Gerard’s side and grasped his shoulder, much like Ray had done earlier in the evening. “I suppose I will take your word for it. For now.”

“Please do.”

“We should both be in bed.” He had a concerned look in his eyes that made Gerard smile.

“As you say. And if Mikey needs anything in the night, call me.”

“Only if you attempt to sleep.” Frank ordered, and then left the room.

“There is no rest for the wicked,” Gerard mumbled to himself in protest before undressing and going to bed.

In his dreams, it always looked a little different. The scene was hazy, and there were more people, like at a party. Everyone smiling and giggling, and having a good time. Gerard was usually lying on the couch, the euphoria diminished by darkness. How lovely it was to feel the drug in his lungs, but the despair was eating him alive. His life wasn’t worth living, and the opium wasn’t helping anymore. Everyone was happy... Except for him.

Then he saw the stranger, the one he knows now is Nicolo DiCosimo. His strawberry blond curls, hair short and perfectly styled, with blue eyes and skin just as pale as Gerard himself. His suit, rather than the severe black Gerard preferred, was a soft looking brown. Gerard knew if he touched it he would find the suit was velvet. That the brocade olive green waistcoat was silk, the same as the burned orange ascot. He was a lovely picture, and Gerard had wanted to draw him, though he could hardly move.

He came over and introduced himself, insisted that Gerard call him Nick, and sat beside him on the tiny bed Gerard was lying on. "I can make it stop," he said, his smile kind. "I can make life worth living again. But you must give me something in return."

"Anything," Gerard always said.

"I require your soul. Are you willing to give it to me, Gerard?"

Just as in real life, he didn't think twice. "Yes."

Gerard felt Nick's lips on his, fingers tangled in his hair, and suddenly, he couldn't breathe, there was a burning sensation on his side and he wanted to scream...

He woke gasping, running his hand through his hair, expecting to find the fingers still twisted there. But there was nothing. Gerard trembled, and collapsed back against the mattress. He pulled up his shirt, and gingerly touched the mark there. It was faded, but he could still make out Nick's symbol, burned into his skin. A circle, with three sickles connected by a heart. It caused Gerard to shiver.

It was morning, though Gerard wasn't sure of the time. When he had dreams of those times, it was impossible to get back to sleep, though he was terribly fatigued. He was sweating, and imagined the drugs in his body again. He rang for Worm, knowing he wouldn't be getting back to sleep.

Gerard forced himself to get up and reach, and got to the basin in the corner. Pouring the water from the jug, he washed his hands and face, hoping to rid himself of the creeping, twisting sensation inside. When the door opened and Worm entered, he felt almost normal again.

"You're up early, sir," said Worm, placing the tray with Gerard's morning coffee on a side table.

"Yes, I'm as surprised as you," he teased. Gerard saw an envelope on the tray and raised an eyebrow. "Was the post early today?"

"It was brought by a courier in the night," Worm explained, "I didn't wish to disturb you."

"It's quite all right. I'm sure it's nothing urgent." Gerard fixed himself a cup of coffee, while Worm laid out his clothes for the day. He practically inhaled the coffee, and made a second cup immediately.

“Will you be going out again today, sir?”

“I think not. I feel rather like writing.”

Worm took that as his cue to leave. It wasn't so much that Gerard didn't like him, they'd known each other forever. But he sometimes still felt uncomfortable with the fact the man was his servant, when to Gerard he was more like a friend.

Gerard dressed, and once he'd finished he opened the letter. He nearly gagged on his coffee; the letter was from Grant Morrison. Gerard nearly tripped in his rush out the door, and he was relieved to see Frank was already awake and in the library.

“What's the matter with you?” Frank asked, looking up from his book.

“I need your advice,” Gerard said to him. “Mr. Morrison has sent me a letter!”

“Excuse me?”

Gerard realized he hadn't told Frank and Mikey what happened, so he quickly explained.

Frank's eyes widened. “So Grant Morrison has sent you a letter? Perhaps he wishes for you two to become better acquainted.”

“We met only yesterday,” he said, bewildered. “He must have sent this shortly after as Worm said it arrived last night.”

“What does it say?”

Gerard blushed. “I haven't read it yet.”

Frank rolled his eyes. “Would you prefer I read it to you?” He teased.

“I might, as a matter of fact.” Gerard handed him the letter and sat down.

“You're a coward.”

“I'm aware of that, please read it.”

Frank cleared his throat and read aloud,

“*Mr. Way,*

"I was pleased to meet you this evening. I wish I could have said more during our brief interlude, but unfortunately there was not time. Mr. Gaiman was kind enough to provide me with your address. I know the two of you are acquainted, and he has told me you and your friends are responsible for one of the best operas I've ever seen. The Ebony Processional is a personal favorite of mine. The music especially is beautiful, and I have one of the gramophone cylinder recordings of it. I am surprised I have not worn it out; I listen to it so often."

Frank stopped, looking at Gerard with surprise. "He likes our music?"

Gerard made a squeaking sound that was most undignified. Frank laughed and kept reading.

"It was a key influence on my demented jester in my most recent Dark Inspector novel. For which I am immeasurably grateful. I would be even more so if we could discuss your work in more detail, and of course you would be welcome to ask me any questions you have. I am unavailable for social engagements at the moment, however I would enjoy corresponding with you."

"Please send me your answer at your earliest convenience. Sincerely, Grant Morrison."

Frank was grinning now, and though Gerard was excited, he also felt quite sick. "Oh my lord, Frankie," he groaned. "What do I do?!"

"The answer is obvious if you'll forgive me saying so," Frank replied. "Write him back."

"But what do I say?!"

"Ask him about his work. Or if you don't wish to speak with him, make your excuses. You certainly have your hands full at present."

Gerard rubbed his face with his hands, then said, "I want to write him. But I'm afraid of making myself look foolish."

"I think you needn't fear. You are an odd fellow, but so is he."

That made Gerard smile. "Thank you Frank."

"Any time, Gee. I'm going to go see if Mikey is up yet." And Frank left the room, handing the letter to Gerard as he did so.

Gerard read the letter several times over. He wanted to write back,

and in the same breath wished that the letter had never arrived. At the mention of Neil, he raised an eyebrow. Gerard admitted it should have occurred to him that they had friends in common, and that Neil would be one of them. He was, after all, one of the most popular authors in the country. Possibly even the world.

He rose and went to his study, letter in hand. If he couldn't think of a reply, he could at least work on his novels.

It wasn't until later that night that he managed to quell his nerves enough to put pen to paper, and he wrote to Mr. Morrison.

Mr. Morrison,

You flatter me with your praise, but I am pleased to hear of your fondness for The Ebony Processional . It was a labor of both love and hatred that my brothers and I slaved over. We started friends, but became family over the years. If not for their genius, Cartridges for Your Devotion , Celebration for Divine Retribution, and The Ebony Processional would have remained dreams rather than brought to life by the talents of Misters Michael Way, Frank Iero, Ray Toro, and myself.

I admit I was surprised to received your note, but I would be more than happy to carry on a mutual correspondence. Anything you would care to know about my work, simply ask and I will answer as best I can.

I myself do have questions about your work, which I have enclosed on a separate sheet of paper.

Sincerely,

Gerard Way

While it was a little more bare than he wanted, and the questions were bordering on silly. However, it was the best of all his drafts. So he put it out for the morning post and went to bed, anxious for Mr. Morrison's reply.

The next few days, however were so busy that Gerard hardly spared a thought for the letter. Mikey's physical symptoms had subsided, but his mind was still scarred from the after effects of the opium. He ranted and railed against Gerard and Frank, cursing them with everything he could think of. Then he would cry and apologize

profusely, begging their forgiveness. In turn, Frank and Gerard would do their best to console him.

It was exhausting, and something neither of them enjoyed. But they knew it would be worth it. And of course they wouldn't lay this burden on their friends, or the servants. To prevent the spread of gossip it was only Worm, a chambermaid and a cook in the house. Though all were sworn to secrecy. Frank took on most of the burden as he shared quarters with Mikey.

After dinner one night, which as usual was shared in Mikey's rooms, Gerard went to his study. He had made no headway on his manuscript, and while Mr. Lee was the forgiving sort, Gerard was worried it would become horribly overdue.

He was surprised to see an envelope on his desk, and when he saw the writing on it, his heart beat fast and hard. It was Mr. Morrison's response, though how long it had been there Gerard did not know. He hadn't entered his study in days. He opened it and was surprised to find it was nearly twenty pages long.

Gerard sat down to read, and found himself charmed by Mr. Morrison. There was a slight tendency towards perversity, yet his personal writing retained a warm sense of humor in . Something only vaguely touched upon in his published works. What startled Gerard the most were the questions.

There were many, some about Gerard's writing, others about the musical work with Mikey, Frank and Ray. Even more surprising were the questions Mr. Morrison asked Gerard about his own work, looking for Gerard's opinion as both a reader and a fellow professional writer. He was not sure of how to respond, as he wanted to be truthful but polite, and Gerard was not particularly skilled at balancing the two.

Normally, he would have asked Mikey or Ray how best to respond. But this letter felt more private than the last, and he didn't want to break Mr. Morrison's confidence.

His own return letter took most of the night, and was just as long. It proved quite the distraction. He left it for Worm to put in the post when the sky started to lighten. The sun would be up soon. "Another night lost, and another delay for the Malcontents," Gerard murmured. There was the pang of guilt, but he ignored it in favor of going to check on his brother and Frank.

Gerard slipped into Mikey's rooms, as quietly as he could manage. He

silently opened the bedroom door a crack and looked inside. The sight that met his eyes made him sigh in relief.

Mikey was asleep, his arms around Frank who was slumbering next to him. They clung to each other, and it warmed Gerard's heart that they looked so content. He silently shut the door and went to his own rooms. As he entered, Gerard felt another pang, this one being the familiar one of loneliness.

It was easy enough to push aside, after all he'd done so frequently since his recovery. Before then, he could always be found in the company of Robert McCracken. But once Gerard had sobered, their relationship had soured before ending completely. It had been incredibly painful for both parties, though Bert hadn't handled it well at all. He had declared that Gerard was a liar and a disloyal friend.

Gerard wished he could have told him the truth. Or that he could tell anyone. But who would believe him? Assuming he wasn't shipped off to Bedlam, the second choice was likely to be turned over to the church. And there was nothing either institution could do for him.

He scolded himself for dwelling on such things, and for the jealousy he felt towards Mikey and Frank. They were happy, and he should be happy for them rather than envious. But it didn't stop him from wishing there was someone he could share his life with. Someone to curl up with in his own bed. And as he slid under the covers, he pulled a pillow into his arms. It was as close as he could get to intimate companionship, and it would have to do.

It wasn't enough.

Being awakened by a cranky sibling is never pleasant. Less so when it's a younger sibling who has no qualms about shouting until the elder one returns to consciousness. Gerard was bleary eyed and barely coherent as he sat up. He had only been asleep for a couple hours. "What's going on?"

"Finally!" Mikey said, and sat on the side of the bed. "I thought you had died! I've been trying to rouse you for a quarter of an hour."

"You seen to be in better spirits," Gerard growled, and flopped back against the pillows.

“Pete’s coming to visit today,” Mikey replied as way of explanation.

“Dear me, I will not survive this day,” Gerard grumbled. “What is so important you couldn’t allow me to sleep? I had a late night.”

“You have a telegram from Mr. DiDio,” Mikey told him, and Gerard’s eyes widened. He snatched the telegram from his brother and began to read.

“He is reminding me I only have a fortnight to submit the new manuscript with the changes that were requested. Otherwise the second Parasol School book will be delayed. And to remind me that he hasn’t seen hide nor hare of the first draft of the Malcontents.”

Mikey frowned. “Have I disturbed your work? I know I have been... Trying your patience these past few weeks.”

Gerard shook his head, and took Mikey’s hand in his. “It’s not you.” At his brother’s skeptical look, he smiled. “Really, I promise this isn’t your fault, it’s mine. I’ve allowed myself to divert attention from my work. So much has happened.”

“Frank said Grant Morrison is writing to you,” Mikey commented, an eyebrow raised.

Gerard blushed. “Uh... Yes, he is.”

“Is that distracting you too?”

“A little,” Gerard confessed.

Mikey laughed, and it was good to hear. “You’re ridiculous.”

“I have greatly admired his novels since my formative years. I am allowed to be flustered!”

“You behave as though you have a school boy crush.” When Gerard didn’t respond, Mikey frowned. “Do you?”

“No! At least I don’t think so,” he replied.

“In all seriousness, you should try to concentrate on your own work. I understand your fascination with Mr. Morrison, but your reputation has suffered enough already. You needn’t add ‘unreliable’ to it.”

It was Gerard’s turn to frown. “Frank told you about the rumors.” It wasn’t a question.

“Yes,” Mikey sighed, and pushed his spectacles up his nose. Gerard recognized it as a gesture he often used when he was ready to let loose his feelings. “Letting slip you had a dalliance with my betrothed and I have left town to lick my wounds. Away to Frank’s family home in Italy as a matter of fact. How did you convince Alicia to go along with such a ridiculous farce?”

“It was partially her idea. But she is blameless. It was my choice to execute the plan.” He shrugged. “I wasn’t sure how long you would be ill, and you still haven’t healed. I thought it likely that a broken heart would take the same amount of time to recover from. And perhaps longer for me to earn your forgiveness as in those last weeks you were so insistent on angrily declaring to everyone that I was to blame for your troubles.”

“It wasn’t your fault I took up your old habits,” Mikey mumbled.

“Of course, but no one knows of your troubles, remember? So inventing a love triangle was easiest explanation. I’m rather proud of myself actually.” Gerard was grinning now. “I’m such a scoundrel!”

“You are a ridiculous man.” Now Mikey looked concerned. “It won’t ruin her prospects, will it?”

The smile fell from Gerard’s face. He was hesitant, but said to Mikey, “She has left for America with a rather wealthy tycoon. She’s... She’s very happy, Mikey. I wasn’t sure when to tell you.”

Mikey though, he did smile, and he squeezed Gerard’s hand. “I’m glad she’s found happiness. It was never going to work; asking her to marry me in order to shield myself and Frank from suspicion was selfish.”

“She was more than ready to do so, if you recall.”

“I should never have let her. If I had really thought on it...” He trailed off. “Regardless, I don’t enjoy this fiction that you’re some penny dreadful villain who attempted to steal my fiancée’s heart. And her virtue, according to some.”

That drew a bitter laugh from Gerard. “If they only knew my incompetence in such matters, the rumor would not have spread so easily.

Then it was Mikey’s turn to frown. “Gerard, are you all right?”

“It’s nothing.” At his brother’s skeptical look, he shook his head.

“Really, it’s nothing to concern you. I was mocking myself.”

“You’re not a very good liar, Gerard.”

“I am when I’m speaking to someone who hasn’t known me their entire life.”

Mikey sighed. “Fine, keep your secrets, and your own counsel.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Now get up, and get dressed. Pete will be here soon.”

“Must I rise for this? Pete is here to see you, not me.”

“Yes, you must. Now get up. I’ll send Worm up with coffee,” Mikey promised.

It was the only reason he rose.

It was nearly a month later, when Gerard was working, that he received a calling card from Mr. Morrison. It was lucky that Mikey and Frank were otherwise occupied upstairs, so they would not need to hide. To say he was surprised would have been a mild understatement. Gerard was almost in a panic as he asked one of his servants to send his own card back immediately. Mr. Morrison wanted to pay Gerard a personal visit at home, and that was not something he was about to pass up.

They had been writing to each other steadily, and the letters were becoming almost novel length. In his last, Gerard had complained that he was having trouble concentrating, and that Mr. DiDio was breathing down his neck for the Malcontents. He’d finally finished the final draft for the Parasol School sequel, but just barely in time.

Gerard wondered if that was why Mr. Morrison was calling on him.

Thankfully, Worm helped him to dress, and by the time Mr. Morrison appeared, Gerard was mostly presentable. There were minor ink stains on his fingers and his hair was a shade untidy, but Mr. Morrison didn’t appear to notice as Gerard greeted him in the foyer.

“What a pleasure it is to see you again!” Gerard enthused, internally

wincing at the tone of his voice.

"The pleasure is mine. And might I say you have a beautiful home." Mr. Morrison was smiling as Gerard led him into the sitting room.

"Thank you. It's a recent purchase, but I quite like it." They sat across from each other and Gerard asked Worm to bring in a tea tray.

Once the tea arrived and each of them had a cup, Mr. Morrison began to speak. "I'm sure you are wondering why I am calling on you today. The reason is thus: I make for the country shortly, as the weather is changing. I will be returning to my house in Scotland. Being as you are a writer who greatly interests me, I would like to invite you to stay."

It took Gerard a moment to catch up. "You wish me to go with you to Scotland?"

"Yes."

"You hardly know me!" Gerard exclaimed, his voice squeaking. Realizing he'd been rude, he amended, "I mean, surely there are others with whom you are better acquainted that you would prefer travel with you."

"There are, but I prefer to get to know people there rather than in town. It's so busy in London, after all, and there are so many diversions. And I find I would like to know you better than I do now. Besides, it may help you with your manuscript."

"Mr. Morrison..."

"Grant, please."

That made him smile. "And you must call me Gerard. Grant, I am very flattered, don't misunderstand. But I do worry that once you know me better, as you say, that you will tire of me quickly."

Grant had a small smile on his own face, and he shook his head. "I find that doubtful. Regardless, I would like for you to come and stay with me. I feel it would be beneficial to both of us. Perhaps the basis of a great friendship, if not a great working relationship."

"How do you mean?"

"I rather like living with other writers. It's convenient to have

someone to confer with on certain ideas. It brings about a vibrant atmosphere of creativity. And it would give me an opportunity to see some of the Malcontents in advance.” There was a twinkle in his eye of barely repressed humor.

Gerard stared for a moment, and then burst into laughter. “Oh you are a charming devil aren’t you! I would like to go to the country with you. But I must speak with my staff and friends first. I should be able to give you a definite answer within the week.”

“That is perfectly acceptable. If you would, please notify me of your decision by letter or telegram as soon as you are able.”

“I will.”

“Excellent. I will go on ahead to be certain the house is prepared, but I expect to see you there no later than September the 1st. Are we agreed?”

“Yes, agreed!”

Grant rose, and Gerard followed suit. “Thank you Gerard, this has been a pleasant visit. I may call on you again.”

“I would like that,” Gerard admitted, and he showed Grant out.

Once he was gone, Gerard went upstairs right away. He found Mikey and Frank settled together on the settee, Frank’s arm around Mikey’s shoulders as he read to him. They looked up when Gerard came in, and Mikey asked, “What happened? You look like you’ve seen a ghost, Gee.”

“Grant invited me to the country,” he blurted out.

“Wait, since when is he ‘Grant’?” Frank asked, putting the book away.

“And he invited you where?” Mikey inquired.

“To his home in Scotland,” said Gerard, and he sat down. “We... He wants to work with me. Get to know me.”

“Are you going to marry him?” Mikey asked, his tone flat, but Gerard could still feel the humor in it.

“I think not.” He sighed again and rubbed at his face. “Oh Lord. What am I going to do?” Gerard was suddenly seized by anxiety, and he couldn’t have said why.

“Go with him.” That made Gerard look at Mikey, startled. “No, really, go with him. You admire him, you get along well, and you’ve been having difficulty concentrating. Time away from London would be good for you.”

“What of you two?” Gerard asked.

“We can go visit my mother. We’ve been meaning to anyway,” Frank pointed out. “He’s right Gerard. You’ve been holed up here looking after Mikey, and me, and your work is suffering for it. Maybe some isolation and Mr. Morrison’s input would give you a new outlook on the Malcontents.”

“I’m not so sure.”

“You’re worried about me,” said Mikey, and he extricated himself from Frank to kneel by his brother’s side. “And I don’t blame you. But you need to focus on yourself, Gerard. Go with Mr. Morrison. We’ll be alright.”

He sighed. “I promised him I would think on it.”

“Don’t linger on the question too long,” Mikey advised.

Gerard groaned and stood up, retiring to his own rooms. He flopped on the bed, and retreated into his thoughts. There was only one person he’d have to speak with before leaving town, and it wasn’t going to be easy to meet with him. Especially without drawing the attention of Frank and Mikey.

He’d had to wait until nearly two o’clock in the morning, as Mikey and Frank went to sleep so late. But the house was quiet, and Gerard was able to slip out. He hired a carriage to get to where he needed to go. The opium den had closed long ago, and Nick had moved on to better venues. He found himself outside a fairly ordinary looking house on Cleveland Street.

Gerard was admitted immediately, and taken upstairs. He could hear gasps and moans issuing from the bedrooms they passed, but he ignored them. He was there for business, not pleasure.

He was led into Nick’s office, and he looked up. He looked exactly the same as when Gerard had last seen him, right down to the brown velvet suit. “Gerard, what a pleasant surprise. Do sit down.”

He did as instructed, and said, “I’m leaving, Nick.”

“Are you?” Nick raised an eyebrow. “I don’t recall giving you permission.”

Gerard sighed. “I’m sorry, I’ll rephrase. I want to leave the city for a time.”

“Work suffering?” Nick got up and circled around the desk, then leaned against the edge of it. “I keep telling you Gerard, if you want to relax, spend some time here. The boys will take care of you.”

“And sink further into vice?” Gerard sighed, shaking his head. “It doesn’t interest me, Nick. I want love, not lust.”

“Won’t that be a little difficult to obtain without a soul?”

“So you keep telling me.”

“Ah, so I do.” Nick leaned close to Gerard, and gently touched his face. “Where are you going then?”

“Scotland, with a... Colleague.”

“Does this colleague have a name?”

“Grant Morrison.”

Nick seemed to think about that for a moment, and then took Gerard’s hand. He rolled up his sleeve, and said, “I’ll let you go, but don’t forget that you’re still mine.” Nick was delicately running his fingers along Gerard’s skin, as though looking for something. His nails were suddenly quite long and sharp, and Gerard gulped.

The demon smiled, then sank his thumb nail into Gerard’s elbow pit, breaking the skin. Gerard cried out in pain, and he could feel the mark on his side burning like it had that day. Nick merely smiled. “I may not want your body for my own, Gerard. Don’t misunderstand me, I would make so much money from you and I would have no difficulty putting you to work here in my house. But I own your soul, and with one such as you that is a powerful, heady thing. You’ll do as I say, and next time you get it in your head to go on a retreat, you’ll ask me first instead of assuming I’ll go along with it. Do you understand?”

“Yes, I’ll remember,” Gerard whined, trying to squirm away from him.

“Good boy, know your place,” Nick said, and released Gerard. “Now get out.”

Gerard got to his feet, and fled the house.

Gerard looked out the carriage window, rain splashing on his face when he opened it. It was rather late, and quite cold out. The road was rough, and Gerard was being bumped around quite a bit. He hoped to arrive at their destination soon, as he had been travelling for many days. London to Edinburgh wasn't as bad, as he'd taken the train. But the rest of the journey was to be conducted via coach, as the tracks to Glasgow were blocked.

They'd passed Glasgow not too long ago, and Gerard assumed they must be nearly there. He shouted out the window, "Driver, could you please tell me how far it is now?"

"Not long," he shouted over the wind. "Get back in sir, this storm's kicking up an awful bloody fuss!"

Gerard did as instructed and closed the window. Not long... It made his heart leap inside his chest, but his stomach was also in knots.

He knew his things had been delivered days ago, so there was no need to worry on that score. But something else was troubling him, that his friend Gabriel had brought up the day he left. Despite the season being over, word had spread through London like wildfire about Grant's invitation. People were talking, and Gabriel had told him, "They think you're his new lover."

It made a flush creep across Gerard's cheeks every time he thought of it. Was that why Grant had invited him? If asked, Gerard wasn't sure he would say no. His reputation however was tarnished already with his drinking and other unsavory habits from years ago. He supposed he could live with a bad reputation. That hadn't stopped Grant or any of Gerard's friends. But he didn't want any impropriety to taint his family. Gabriel had warned him to be careful.

All of a sudden, Gerard could see lights through the trees in the distance. His heart leapt at the sight, so eager he was for the journey to be over. In no time at all, the coach pulled up to the front of the house. Though using the word house didn't seem to do it justice. It was a stone mansion, and even in the dark Gerard could tell it was massive. He disembarked and paid the driver, grabbing his sole case he'd brought for travelling, and went to the door.

The rain had lightened to a drizzle, and as he knocked all he wanted was a warm fire and perhaps a cup of tea. He waited for nearly five minutes until the doors opened. Gerard had been expecting a servant, but it was Grant himself who stood there. He smiled and stepped aside. "Gerard, I'm glad to see you." Gerard stepped inside and Grant closed the door.

"Leave your suitcase there, I'll wake one of the servants and have them bring it to your room. I asked them to set food and tea out before they retired, in case you were hungry."

"I would not say no to either," Gerard replied easily as he set his bag on the floor.

"Excellent. Follow me."

Grant led him into a massive library, the size of which boggled Gerard's mind. It was the size of two ballrooms, and the shelves were on two floors of the building. There were staircases that led to the upper level, and ladders to reach the highest shelves. There were four fireplaces, and gas lamps throughout. Though only one fire and very few of the lamps were lit. Even with the dimness in the room, it was quite beautiful.

He couldn't help but stare for a moment, which made Grant chuckle. Gerard blushed and said, "I apologize, I did not mean to be rude. But this library! I have never seen its equal in a private home! Oh, Frank would die to see this."

"Frank?" Grant asked, looking puzzled.

Gerard clarified. "Frank Iero. Fellow composer and first chair violin on my compositions. Including the *Ebony Processional*."

"Ah. And he's a book lover?"

"Very much so. I will have to write to him about this. He will be green with envy."

"Perhaps one day, when we have known each other longer, I shall invite Mr. Iero to see it in person." Grant by this time had fetched a cup of tea for Gerard, and he handed it to him.

Gerard grinned up at Grant. "He would love that." He sipped the tea and sighed, moving closer to the fire as he did so. He sighed happily, feeling his fingers and toes beginning to warm. His clothes and hair

were lightly damp, but the fire was taking care of that.

“Are you hungry?” Grant asked.

Gerard shook his head. “Truthfully, no. I was more relieved to hear there was tea.”

Grant laughed. “Are you a tea aficionado?”

He shook his head. “I much prefer coffee. But tea is what is often available.”

“I myself love coffee, but I admit I do prefer tea. I shall notify the servants of your preference however. Quietly in particular makes a wonderful cup of coffee.”

“Quietly?”

“Yes, he’s my... I suppose butler isn’t quite right as he is also my secretary and a friend. You could say he runs the household, and my life. You will meet him tomorrow. How was your journey?”

Gerard described his journey in detail to Grant, and they sat by the fire and talked late into the night. Gerard grew drowsy as the conversation went on, and he yawned when he heard a clock in the distance strike the hour. Grant raised an eyebrow. “You must be quite fatigued from your journey. Perhaps we should leave this for tomorrow night.”

“Yes, of course,” Gerard replied, getting to his feet. Grant followed suit.

“I’ll show you to your room.” He picked up one of the lamps, and Gerard followed him out of the library.

Once they’d gone up the stairs, there were a few twists and turns, and Gerard knew he would become lost in the morning. As they went, Grant talked of the daily routine. “Breakfast is at eight, luncheon is at noon, and supper is at seven. I normally eat in my rooms, as I do not like to be up and about during the daytime.”

“Neither do I,” Gerard admitted.

“Really?” Grant asked, a smile appearing on his face. “Then simply ring for one of the servants when you wake and they will bring you whatever you wish. Should you require any supplies such as ink or

paper, talk to Quitely, he will procure them for you. Any research material you should be able to find in the library. If not, it can be ordered through the book shop in town. Ah, here we are.”

They stopped in front of a door, and Grant opened it, handing the lamp to Gerard. There was already a fire going in the room. “I will see you tomorrow evening. That is when I normally rouse myself from my solitude. I must warn you Gerard, I do not like to be disturbed during the day. I can become quite tempestuous when interrupted as I value quiet and privacy when writing. Surely you understand.”

His gaze was intense and sharp as any blade as he said it. His brown eyes were suddenly quite dark and the lamp threw the angles of his face into sharp contrast. It made him appear otherworldly.

Gerard nodded, a bout of nervousness suddenly overcoming him. “I do,” he stammered.

In an instant, Grant’s face smoothed, and his eyes were warm once again. “I am grateful for your comprehension. It’s the only rule I have here. Do not disturb me during the day.”

“Of course I won’t.” Gerard yawned again. “I must retire. Good night Grant.”

“Good night Gerard.”

As Gerard was preparing to sleep, something struck him as odd. The hallways were pitch black, and Grant hadn’t taken the lamp with him when he left.

Gerard didn’t wake until nearly midday, and when he did he was groggy. Travelling always made him a bit fuzzy headed for the first day or so afterwards, but he knew what would fix it. He pulled on his dressing robe, which had been laid out for him by a thoughtful servant. It made him smile as he wrapped himself in the ratty old thing. It was quite thick, and had a hood which Gerard adored. He hadn’t found any other gown he preferred, which was why it was somewhat tattered. He pulled the hood up to give himself a bit more warmth, as it was surprisingly cold despite the fire having been refreshed and burning merrily in the grate.

Gerard found a pull bell near the bed, and used it to summon a

servant. He was surprised when a man with dark hair and light eyes appeared at his door. He had a tray with coffee and Gerard smiled, saying, "It's as though you read my mind."

"Mr. Morrison specified that you prefer coffee, sir." He replied and placed the tray on a table. He then bowed. "I am Quiteley, sir."

"Yes, Grant told me about you! He said you run the household... And his life." Gerard was making himself a cup of coffee, with a little cream and sugar, just how he liked it. He sighed happily when he drank from the cup. "Oh this is divine!"

Quiteley had busied himself with picking up a few of the clothes that Gerard had left on the floor, and he smiled. "I am glad to hear it. Mr. Morrison has asked that I explain some more rules of the house. Well, when I say rules... They're more like guidelines. Or customs."

"As you wish," Gerard replied and sat down to enjoy his coffee.

"There aren't many servants here. There's myself obviously, the cook, the groundskeeper, the two maids and my assistant, Stewart. Do you have a valet, sir?"

"He's on holiday." Gerard replied. That made Quiteley raise an eyebrow and Gerard chuckled. "I'm not used to having a valet. When he begins to annoy me I send him elsewhere." This of course wasn't strictly the truth. Worm had insisted on accompanying Mikey and Frank to Italy, and he would return to England as soon as they were settled, then join Gerard in Scotland.

"Will he be joining you here?"

"Yes, in the next week or two.. I'd already mentioned to Grant that Worm is coming."

That really made his eyebrows raise and Gerard laughed outright. "He insists on the name, I have not asked why as I'm not sure I want to know."

"As you say, sir. I mention this because this is a very night oriented household. As the winter comes on, most things such as meals and forms of entertainment will take place after dusk. It's the normal state of the house, I'm afraid. We only keep daylight hours when there's a guest and they don't last for very long."

Gerard finished his coffee and made himself a second cup. "That

shouldn't be a problem. I prefer later hours myself."

"And is there anything you will be needing in the future? The closer it gets to December, the more likely it is that we'll be closed off from the village."

That made Gerard curious. "What do you mean?"

"The cold temperatures make it difficult to get to town. We are in the process of getting things stored and preserved for the winter months. It's likely that after Christmas no one will be able to leave the manor."

Gerard hummed a bit, and shook his head. "I can't think of anything right off I would need an excess supply of. Except perhaps coffee. But I will think on it and let you know soon."

"Thank you sir. Mr. Morrison has also asked that I tell you there are several cats that have free reign over the house and grounds. And that he hopes you don't mind."

Gerard frowned a bit. "I'm mildly allergic to cats. But I can live with them."

"Very good sir. Will you be dining in your quarters?"

"Yes, I'm still tired. I'd like to remain in my room for today."

"As you wish."

The days progressed, and the next week was surprisingly routine. Gerard would wake around noon, have his coffee and breakfast and write until dinner. He would meet Grant in the dining hall and they would discuss a wide array of subjects, from mythology to modern science. After dinner, Quiteley would bring down their books and papers, and each would take a desk in the library to work at. Occasionally, Grant would ask Gerard a question, or vice versa, and it would lead to another conversation.

Gerard was staying up later and later. By the time Worm arrived, it wasn't unusual for him to begin his day at five in the afternoon and retire early in the morning. Worm was somewhat annoyed that he had to change his schedule too, but he didn't complain too much. Gerard offered him a slight pay raise in compensation but Worm wouldn't

take it.

Still, something was troubling Gerard. Occasionally, Grant would return to his rooms early. And sometimes Gerard saw one of the maids or another servant leaving, their clothing mussed and looking somewhat unfocused. He blushed as he thought about it. Gerard wasn't a virgin, but he was not experienced in carnal pleasures. That was what was making staying with Grant all the more difficult.

Gerard would occasionally catch Grant watching him. The way he looked at him made his blood run cold, but also make him blush. A gaze that could cut diamonds, like the night of his arrival. And rather than looking away, Grant would continue to stare. Eventually Grant would shake himself, as though waking from a dream, and return to his writing. It was both unnerving and intriguing.

If that wasn't confusing enough, Grant also had a very gentle side. It came about one night that one of the cats that lived on the grounds was injured, Grant took special care of the cat. He bandaged its wounds, and for three days and three nights he gently nursed it back to health. Once the cat was feeling better, Grant released him back onto the grounds, which the cat was grateful for.

He was also kind to people. When one of the maids got sick, Grant paid for her to be seen by a physician, which was unusual enough. But he also gave her two weeks off and insisted she rest. Gerard thought it was one of the sweetest things he'd ever seen. Especially when Grant personally took her some soup.

All of this information left Gerard feeling conflicted. What if Gabriel was right? What if Grant had only invited him here to be his new play thing? Or what if Grant had deeper feelings? Feelings that were more akin to what Gerard felt for Grant? That caused him more anxiety, as he wasn't sure if he was reading too much into everything.

There were three people he needed to write to for advice, as they were his closest friends. Gabriel of course, though he could probably also expect a letter from Gabriel's twin brother Fabio if he did. Becky, though he was certain her letter would be delayed due to her involvement in the suffrage movement. And Ray, whom he'd known since his school days.

He wrote to all three, and hoped for a quick response. In the meantime though, Gerard was beginning to feel strained. It wasn't just Grant, or how weird he was acting. He was having dreams about

meeting Nick, and that never went well. It was making him incredibly nervous, as though Nick were going to pop out of the shadows at any time.

One evening, Grant was staring at him again and Gerard couldn't help himself. "Have I done something to offend you?"

Grant blinked, looking confused. "Why would you think that?"

"You are staring at me as though I killed one of your cats."

Grant sighed. "You have done nothing to earn my ire. I apologize; I sometimes seem hostile when in truth I am simply thinking."

"My apologies as well then." But Gerard didn't believe him, because the minute he went back to his paper, he could see Grant staring at him again out of the corner of his eye. Gerard kept writing, in hopes the crawling feeling on the back of his neck would soon go away.

It made it difficult for Gerard to concentrate, and when he most wanted to throw his notebook across the room, Grant got up and left the room. Gerard thought perhaps he could calm down after that, but instead he was anxious. When Grant came back, he went to Gerard's side and gently pushed some of his hair out of his face. "Are you alright?" He asked.

"I'm finding it difficult to concentrate." Gerard didn't say why.

Grant raised an eyebrow but didn't ask him about it. Instead he asked, "I learned something while traveling that could help you to relax. But I would have to touch you. Would you be alright with that?"

Gerard swallowed a bit and nodded. "Yes, that's acceptable."

Grant's hands went to Gerard's shoulders, and in moments he was kneading his muscles. Gerard hadn't had a massage in ages, but Grant certainly knew what he was doing. It felt great, and he relaxed almost instantly. Grant's touch was gentle, but thorough, and he worked out all the kinks in Gerard's shoulders and neck.

"This feels wonderful," Gerard said, suppressing a moan.

"Not all gentlemen are familiar with it unless they're athletes. It's called the Swedish Method, it's used to relax and soothe muscles, though the practice itself is actually centuries old."

“Massage, you mean?”

Grant chuckled. “Yes, that’s it. Frequent the bath houses do we?”

“No, but some of the... Unfortunate women I knew, it was their specialty.” It was the delicate term for prostitutes, which Gerard was sure Grant would know.

“Oh?”

“Yes. I wouldn’t... I would pay them for the massage only, when I was low.”

Grant stopped briefly so that he could look at Gerard. “There’s nothing wrong with that, Gerard. I wouldn’t think less of you for that. I wouldn’t even think less of you if you had paid them for sexual services.”

Gerard blushed at that. “I wouldn’t have though.”

“You probably didn’t need to.”

“I just... Didn’t. I was in misery and no one appealed to me.”

“That I can understand, as I’ve been in that situation myself.” Grant went back to working the tension out of Gerard’s shoulders. “It was my birthday. I was in Spain, and in the company of three very lovely dancing girls. But instead of partaking in the pleasures they offered, I lectured them at great length about science.”

Gerard couldn’t help but laugh. “You? Seriously?”

“Yes I should tell you my reputation is largely the invention of myself and those jealous of my talent. I’m actually quite dull once you get to know me.”

“I’m certain I have said the same to you already.”

“So far you have not proven yourself right.” Grant pulled his hands away. “There, how do you feel now?”

“Much better. Thank you.” Of course, that Gerard’s face wasn’t on fire with embarrassment and desire was a miracle.

Ray was the first to write back to him, and in the letter he asked for details of their relationship so far, and for Gerard's own feelings. Which led to Gerard mailing a sixteen page letter back to his friend and former collaborator.

Becky told him to go for it "before someone else gets him, he's gorgeous!" Gerard wrote of the incident the previous night.

Gabriel sent a card that simply said, "I told you so." Fabio sent a pornographic drawing of Grant along with his brother's card. Which Gerard promptly burned in the fireplace.

If he were truthful with himself, Gerard would have admitted he'd been thinking more and more about Grant in that way. He'd caught himself wondering what Grant would look like naked, how it would feel to have Grant kiss him and touch him. Gerard would have to snap himself out of it, as sometimes these day dreams would visit him while he was working with Grant or even speaking to him. The worst part was, Gerard was sure that Grant suspected why he'd been so inattentive as of late.

One night, Grant stood and said, "Perhaps we should go for a walk. It's a warm evening, and it might help you clear your head."

"Yes, perhaps. I'll fetch my coat."

When they were outside, they strolled at a leisurely pace in the gardens, silent for a while. And then Grant surprised him when he asked, "What's your family like?" They hadn't spoken of anything personal since Gerard had arrived.

"My parents are loving people. They raised my brother and I to believe we could be whatever we wished. It may not have been the wisest course as they were working class, but they wanted the best for us. It was my grandmother who thought I had talent as a writer and a singer. She used her meager savings to get me paper and ink and such. She was the real driving force behind me achieving success as a composer. And she was very proud."

Grant smiled at that. "She sounds wonderful. Where is she now?"

"Deceased," Gerard replied. "The year of my first real success is the same year we lost her to death. She is sorely missed."

"You said you have a brother?"

“Michael. He’s in France somewhere, I’m not sure where, and we haven’t spoken in a long time.”

“Why?”

Gerard sighed. Clearly, Grant hadn’t heard the rumors that Gerard had manufactured. And he wanted to keep up the facade for Mikey’s sake. But in the same breath, he didn’t want Grant to think badly of him. So he compromised. “Some troubles with his former betrothed, for which he blames me. They aren’t... I don’t wish to speak of it.”

“A change in subject then. What would you like to talk about?” Grant asked.

Gerard smiled. “Since we have spoken of my family, perhaps we should speak of yours.”

He nodded. “My father was a soldier in the wars, but when he came home he wasn’t proud of what he and his fellow soldiers had done. When asked to return to the battlefield, he refused. He was a conscientious objector. My mother of course fully supported him.”

“Oh my lord... What happened?”

“He was arrested and taken to prison. He died there.”

“I’m so sorry.”

Grant shook his head. “Don’t be, it was a long time ago. And in this day and age I am pleased to see that the gentry are using their heads a little more.”

“What about your mother?”

“She’s still alive. Not as spry as she once was. Age seems to be taking its toll on her mind. My sister looks after her, however.”

“You have a sister?”

“Yes. Her name is Leigh. You’ll meet her this winter. She usually comes ‘round for Christmas.” Grant was quiet for a while after that, and Gerard didn’t want to press the subject. Finally, he began speaking again. “My mother was the one who inspired me to write. She often told me the most fantastic stories. Sometimes I wasn’t sure what was truth and what was not. But it was vital to telling stories myself later on.”

“Does she know she’s your inspiration?”

“She knows that she’s one of many.” Grant chuckled, turning a little. Their walk had taken them farther than Gerard would have thought. They were at the edge of the gardens now, closer to the woods. Grant seemed uneasy, but Gerard wasn’t scared.

“Almost as though they’re alive, isn’t it?” Gerard asked.

“What do you mean?”

Gerard was staring at the trees, and he explained, “The woods at night. Especially if there’s a light breeze. It’s almost as though the trees are alive and reaching out to you. It’s scary but sad.”

“Why sad?”

“Because they can’t touch you. They aren’t trying to scare you, they’re trying to have a connection with you.”

Grant placed a hand on Gerard’s shoulder, which nearly made him jump out of his skin. He’d been pretty absorbed in his thoughts about trees. “You should write that one down Gerard. And we should go in. If it gets much later we won’t be able to see.” Grant was right of course; the moon was beginning to set, so they returned to the house. Grant slipped his arm around Gerard’s shoulders, which gave him a tingling feeling throughout the walk back.

Gerard slept through the next day, as he’d spent the night talking with Grant about the usual potpourri of subjects. When he rose he found a hot pot of coffee already waiting for him, along with letters from his friends. He read them as he dressed.

The twins had sent him yet more pornography, and Gerard was embarrassed but he laughed. These ones he kept as they were surprisingly creative, though they brought a blush to his face almost immediately.

Becky’s letter was laced with concern, but also puzzlement. She asked him flatly, “Why not simply ask him what his feelings are? He would tell you the truth, I’m sure of it. It sounds to me as if you are falling for him! But if this isn’t what you want, let him know you’re uncomfortable and I’m sure that will be the end of it.” Gerard smiled;

Becky was much more sensible in matters of love and desire than he.

The last letter was from Ray, and it was lengthy. He caught Gerard up on the current events of both their families, and then proceeded to deride Grant's "obvious character flaws". Ray sounded both offended and angry. The last two paragraphs did give Gerard cause for concern.

I know much of Mr. Morrison's reputation, as do many in London. He is the kind who will promise the moon to his lovers and desert them shortly after. He is a man who gets what he wants, when he wants it. You know of course of his dealings with certain substances. But rather using them as an instrument of escape as you have, he has used them for inspiration, which to me is far more worrying. I do not want him to lead you back into bad habits.

However, you have told me much of your time with him, and what this burgeoning friendship means to you. If he speaks the truth, than I will retract everything I have said and consider him a worthy fellow. But I wish to assess his character in person. Ask Mr. Morrison if it is agreeable that I visit you in Scotland. You need not tell him the reason if it makes you feel uncomfortable, but I would very much like to learn the truth of his intentions towards you.

Gerard had to think about this. On the one hand, it would be wonderful to see Ray again. On the other, he wasn't sure he wanted Ray picking at Grant. Ray was protective, though he was unfailingly polite. But if Ray didn't approve, it could be a problem. It only took him a moment to come to a decision.

He wrote back to him,

I understand your concerns, but I am all right. I appreciate that you are looking out for me, but you needn't come all the way out here. Please Ray, he's not what people say he is. He's very kind, and not at all inclined to leading people astray. He's a lovely man and I'm very fond of him. Perhaps I will introduce you both later, but for now I would prefer that we not be interrupted in our work.

He knew that Ray wouldn't like it, but Gerard felt this was the right thing to do.

That evening, Gerard was feeling a bit strange. It was the itchy, muffled feeling he'd gotten sometimes when he'd gone a few days

without opium and gin. He couldn't understand why, as he hadn't felt like this in years. He managed to keep himself composed while dining with Grant, but it was a near thing.

They finished dinner and withdrew to the library, where Grant would be studying rather than writing this evening. Gerard was now more determined to make headway on his manuscript, and he focused on nothing else for hours. Until he started feeling tired and hot. The symptoms were getting worse, and Gerard was doing his best to ignore it.

"Are you well?"

Gerard startled at Grant's voice but he nodded. "I will be. I think I am simply fatigued."

Suddenly, Gerard was aware of Grant's hands on him, and the older man said, "You look pale. Perhaps you are becoming ill."

"I don't think so," he replied, but it was difficult to focus. He nearly slumped forward but Grant's hands stopped him.

"Don't exert yourself, I'll take you up to your room."

"No, I'm nearly finished!"

"It will still be there tomorrow. Come along."

Grant got Gerard to his feet and helped him up the stairs, which Gerard thought might be difficult for Grant but the bald man was surprisingly strong. So much so that at one point, Grant picked him up and carried him to his room. As Gerard was laid on the bed, he saw that Grant wasn't even winded, and his gaze was piercing. It was as though he were looking through Gerard.

Gerard's eyes closed as Grant ran a hand through his hair. He sighed, relishing how nice it felt. He tilted his head as Grant's fingers brushed the side of his face and he whispered, "Feels nice."

"You're burning up." Grant replied.

"Your hands are cold," said Gerard in response.

"Gerard..." Grant hissed in his ear. After that, things were fuzzy, and he slipped into dreams.

It was the den again, when he'd first met Nick. He could hear him

laughing, and whispering to Gerard. Telling him awful things. Things that would happen to him now that he no longer had a soul. He wept, and Nick laughed. But another voice was competing with Nick's. It was Grant, soothing him, assuring him that he wasn't evil, he was lost. Gerard didn't dare believe it.

At one point, Nick hissed, "I won't release you, Gerard. Your soul is still mine. Remember that."

Gerard was begging, but Grant was there, commanding, "You've made your point, you can stop now." And it was blackness after that.

But when he woke in the early morning hours, he was alone, and he felt much better. The house was quiet, but as it was before dawn he was sure that Grant would still be awake.

Pulling on his dressing gown and slippers, Gerard slipped out of his room and tiptoed down the hall. He could see a light downstairs, but when he reached the landing he paused. He could hear voices downstairs, and he strained his ears to hear what was being said. It was definitely Grant and Quitely talking, but what about he wasn't sure.

Their voices raised a little as they walked towards the staircase, and Gerard's heart was in his throat. They walked just beneath him as Quitely said, "He's a lovely young man, Grant, and we're all fond of him. But can he be trusted?"

"I believe he can," said Grant. He paused for a moment, and Gerard thought that Grant was looking at him. But Gerard cursed himself for a fool. It was far too dark where he was hiding, no one would be able to see him. Grant kept walking, Quitely at his side. "Have a care for him the next few days, Vince. He's feeling better but I'd prefer he didn't relapse."

They continued to murmur to each other as they walked to another part of the house. Gerard was a bit confused as he went back to his room. Grant had called him Vince, was that his first name? It was certainly unusual for a master to call his butler by a first name, and vice versa. But Grant was an unusual sort of man.

He sighed, and returned to bed, wishing that he could forget the whole thing.

Gerard didn't think anything of the dream, until he received a letter from Nick the next day. He was reading, and occasionally looking out the window. He could see dark clouds outside, and even with the fire there was a distinct chill in the air. When he glanced up again, the letter was propped against the window. It wasn't brought to him by Quitely or any of the other servants, the black envelope simply appeared. He felt a cold sense of dread, but he opened it and read.

Gerard,

I didn't know that your trip away was going to be so enlightening. I have heard that your dear brother is having similar troubles as to what brought us together. Tell me, do you think he would take the same deal that you did? Probably not now. Perhaps he would accept a different offer. He does seem to be quite dedicated to you.

As for Grant Morrison, don't become too attached to him. If he finds out what you are, he won't be so keen to help you next time. You don't have to end your association with him all together as he is fascinating.

It's in your best interest to stay in my good graces, Gerard.

Nick

Gerard wasn't sure what to think. He knew that Nick had powers, though he didn't know their full scope. The letter coming now right after the dream and feeling ill, that was no coincidence. But what did he mean by Grant helping him? Grant had been in the dream, but that didn't mean that he was helping Gerard.

He shook himself, a chill crawling down his spine. But it didn't make sense. Grant, while very interesting, was nothing like Nick. There was almost an aura about the man, whenever Nick was near him it felt like there were insects crawling all over Gerard's skin. With Grant on the other hand it was like sinking into a warm, lovely bath.

Of course, the most worrying portion of the letter was about Mikey. Nick knew the truth, and if he did he could go after Mikey just to torment Gerard. So he immediately started a letter to Frank, warning him to keep Mikey close.

I'll be sending Worm to you right away, so that he can care for you both. Please, don't fight me on this. I'm certain this is only paranoia, but I have a strange feeling that Mikey may be in danger, and that you both will need his help. Please, indulge me.

When it was complete, Gerard immediately went to find Quitely.

"May I help you, sir?" he asked as Gerard walked into one of the parlors.

"Yes, I need this sent to my friend immediately. Send someone to the telegraph office and have them relay this message. I have the instructions written down as to where in Italy it needs to go. And Worm will be leaving, he'll need help packing."

"Is anything the matter, sir?"

"Probably nothing," Gerard admitted, looking sheepish. "But he's going."

"As you wish."

Gerard nodded and went to find Worm to let him know. When he was informed, Worm frowned. "I don't want to go."

"I'll be fine," he said but Worm shook his head.

"You're going to be alone in this place with a man who's in love with you, and the only people here work for him. This isn't an ideal situation."

That made Gerard stop. "You think he's in love with me?"

"I think you're the only person who doesn't know he is," Worm replied, expression serious.

"That is quite a bold statement!" Gerard was flustered, and he wasn't sure if he should be embarrassed or angry.

"It's the truth." Worm was still frowning. "I'll go, as I believe Quitely is a good man and he'll look out for you. But I don't like the idea of you being on your own up here."

"I'm not alone," Gerard reminded him, and smiled. "Thank you for your concern, but Mikey will need you more than me. And if it makes you feel better I believe Ray is coming for a visit at some point."

"Mr. Toro's presence would do you a world of good."

Gerard sighed. "Yes, I'm sure you're right, but I'm so close, I'm making some real headway on the *Malcontents*. I just need a few more weeks of solitude."

"Be careful, sir. Send for me if you need me."

"I will, I promise."

Gerard spent the rest of the day making arrangements for Worm's departure. He wasn't surprised when there was a return telegram for him that evening from Frank.

It said simply, *Stay safe, I'll watch out for him*. He was glad that Frank wasn't asking questions, but he knew that Mikey was going to. It hardly mattered as Worm was packed and on his way to the train station in Glasgow by the time Gerard received the telegram.

And already, Gerard missed him. Worm was a servant, and Gerard sometimes joked that he was a nuisance. But he was also a dear friend, and Gerard was once again alone in the manor with Grant, Quitely, and his people.

He was feeling weak again, so that night he opted to have dinner in his rooms that evening, and beg off from his usual writing and study sessions with Grant.

But that didn't mean that he didn't see the older man. Later that evening, there was a knock on his door, and Gerard said, "Come in." He wasn't really dressed, but he had a robe over his night shirt, and that would have to do. He was already in bed and reading a book.

Grant entered, and he said quietly, "I was coming to check on you. After last night, I was worried."

"I'm feeling better, but still fatigued," confessed Gerard.

"I understand. May I sit?"

"Yes, please."

Grant sat by the bed, and asked him, "So, you're sending away your valet?"

Gerard shrugged. "I just... Need to clear my head. I can do it better without Worm looking over my shoulder. Probably will do me good." He smiled a little.

"Is there something wrong, Gerard?" Grant's tone was concerned, and

he was looking Gerard dead in the eye. "If there is, you can tell me. I can help."

"How?" Gerard blurted out, then covered his mouth with his hand. "I'm sorry, I... I'm well."

"If you say so. Is there anything you require?"

"Stay with me for a while?" The thought of being alone again was suddenly unbearable to Gerard.

Grant seemed to understand that, and smiled. "Yes of course. I suppose a break could be helpful to both of us. Let me fetch some books from the library. Unless you'd like to play a game?"

"What sort of game?"

"Cards, I think. You don't strike me as the kind who likes chess."

Gerard made a face. "I don't."

"Cards it is, then." He got up and left the room, returning shortly with a deck of cards and another book. They spent most of the night playing. Grant taught Gerard how to play cribbage, which Gerard had seen before but never actually learned. It was a lot to go through, but Gerard started to pick it up. However, Grant was persistent.

After the third round, Gerard sighed and put his cards down. "You've bested me once again. I do not believe this is my game."

"I think you'll be better at it once you learn more." He was still smiling. It made Gerard's stomach flip. It wasn't an unpleasant sensation.

By the time Gerard was feeling fatigued, it was nearly three in the morning. His eyelids were starting to droop, and he watched Grant as he read aloud by candlelight.

"Ours is a strange relationship," he said to Grant, too tired to feel embarrassed. Grant put the book down, and fixed Gerard with a piercing look.

"It is indeed. Does it make you uncomfortable?"

"Not at all."

"For that, I am thankful. And I think it best we both retire." Grant

smiled and he stood. "You're being terribly honest, due to your fatigue. I'm sure you'll be mortified come morning."

"Would you hold that against me?" Gerard asked. His eyes were closed now and he was struggling to stay awake.

"No, you're young and have been hurt, I don't blame you for being cautious."

He smiled at that, and Gerard heard more than saw Grant blow out the candle and leave the room. As he fell asleep, he knew that he would regret what he'd said to Grant in the morning. But he wouldn't take anything back, and deep down, Gerard knew this was only the beginning.

When Gerard rose the next day, the sun was high in the sky, and it was much colder than the previous day. He shivered as he got dressed, and when Quiteley came in, he informed Gerard that most of the servants had gone.

"Whatever for?" Gerard asked, curious.

"To get the last of the provisions for the winter. The should return in a day or so."

Gerard smiled a bit. "Does that mean I'll be cooking?"

"Fear not sir, I'm quite handy in the kitchen," Quiteley was smirking in return.

"I'm no chef, but I know a recipe or two myself," Gerard replied. "So if you need an assistant, I'd be happy to help."

"If you insist, sir."

"I do actually." Gerard was grinning, and he turned and left the room. Slightly cheered, Gerard went down to the library a bit early; he had research he wanted to conduct and it would be easier to do when Grant wasn't looking over his shoulder. He'd come to a decision after the previous night. Nick could frighten and threaten Gerard all he wanted, but he wouldn't let the demon do so to his family and friends. He could keep Gerard's soul, so long as he never touched any of theirs.

He was going to fight back.

Gerard was never so grateful in his life that Grant had an extensive collection of books on the occult and the supernatural. He pulled as many on demons that he could find, settled at a desk and started to read. He spent most of the day there, pouring over the books and trying to see if he could find anything of use. By the time Quitely informed him it was dinner time, Gerard thought he might have something to work with.

“I thought I asked you to let me help?” Gerard asked, teasing.

“I remembered sir, but you were otherwise occupied.” Quitely told him.

“I will have to be certain I am not next time.”

Gerard was still smiling as he walked into the dining hall, taking his usual seat at Grant’s right. “I apologize for dawdling.”

“It’s perfectly all right. Quitely tells me that you were absorbed in research,” Grant replied, and Gerard nodded.

“Nothing to do with the *Malcontents*. More a personal fascination.”

“And how are you getting on with your manuscript?”

Gerard sighed, and then said, “It has become something completely different than what I had set out originally. So much so I fear it will not be published.”

“Oh? What has changed?”

“The protagonist was an angry young man in pursuit of gramophone cylinders. Now they are a young girl being pursued by demons in white.”

Grant’s eyebrows rose at that. “I must say, that is quite the change.”

“Yes, I think that Mr. Lee will enjoy it but Mr. DiDio won’t. He is not the most understanding person.”

“I imagine not, but James will take your part, and so will I.”

Gerard smiled again. “Thank you, Grant.”

“You are most welcome.”

They talked over dinner, the conversation kept to lighter subjects.

When they went to the library, Gerard continued with his research. He was no magician, but he was now hopeful he could protect his brother, his friends and Grant.

While he'd been the most worried about Mikey, he couldn't fool himself any longer. Worm may have been right about Grant loving him, but Gerard was falling in love with the older man. And he knew that Nick would take greater pleasure from tormenting Grant just to get at Gerard. The demon was clearly wrong; he could love, even without a soul.

He should have realized it sooner. After all, he loved his friends, he loved his brother, and he loved his brothers in arms, Frank and Ray. He even loved Worm as bossy and sticky about etiquette as he was. And he loved Quitely and the others he'd met ever since he came to Grant's home.

Gerard loved so many, and he knew now he could love deeply and well, though he wasn't sure why until he'd come across a passage that afternoon on bargaining and selling souls.

While the demon does possess and own the victim's soul, they do not control the person's heart and mind. Were this the case, the Soulless would be little better than empty husks, wretched creatures living a half life.

The victim will live comfortably, even well, until their death. At which time the soul's only link to the physical world is severed, and the demon may do as it pleases with the soul. Some are devoured for their power, as is most often the case with the soul of a witch or strong psychic. Others are used in rituals to gain power.

Most importantly, the demon cannot kill the victim to sever the link or the contract is violated and the soul lost to them for all eternity. A fail safe invented to protect humans, and many demons would not be willing to do so as the soul would be weak and useless.

Often, the demon will attempt to control the victim, as a happy soul is a bright soul. This can cause pain or discomfort for the demon, which is a creature of darkness. However, it will not relinquish the old on the person's soul. When attempts to lead the person into vice fail, other tactics will be used to dim the light.

Tactics such as intimidation and fear are used most, but some will resort to harming those the victim is closest to.

It made sense to Gerard. If he didn't have his heart and mind, he

wouldn't be able to create the works that he did. And while he wasn't as affected as he used to be by pain and suffering, it was still there.

By the end of the night, he'd found simple but effective methods that would keep Nick at bay, and he put them to immediate use. He wanted to be specific as to which demon he was protecting them from. He mashed the three together into a powder and set to work.

His knowledge of sigils wasn't great, but Grant had books on that. After studying the mark on his side, Gerard drew it out and used it as a point of reference while he was reading. Gerard kept it hidden whenever Grant was near, but for the most part the older man kept to the other side of the room.

One volume he found was very specific about demons and sigils. The book stated most sigils were used to summon demons, but they could also be used to repel them with the right herbs. Gerard didn't have any hope the protection spell would work on himself, but it didn't have to. The book had stated to reverse the sigil, and to use it in combination with herbs that would shield a person from a demon.

After excusing himself from the library, he raided the kitchen until he found what he was looking for. Gerard was grateful that there was a hillyard on the property, as it was easy to find fresh basil. He was surprised but grateful to find dried cayenne peppers as well. The book he'd found stated basil would turn back negative magic, while cayenne would send it back Nick's way. Salt would bind the whole thing together.

He didn't have long, so he found Quitely's quarters first. Gerard had decided to start there, as he wasn't completely confident it would work. He sprinkled the mixture he'd made from the doorway, then drew the sigil on the door with his finger. Gerard murmured a quick prayer, and he felt it when the spell kicked in. Grinning, he next went to Grant's room and did the same thing. He was even more pleased when it worked once again.

When Gerard returned to his room, he knew that he couldn't just run back to London for such a silly thing, nor could he go to Italy. However, he had letters and telegrams from everyone he cared about, and it was simple enough to sprinkle the concoction on the letters, then draw the sigil on each one.

He let out a breath he didn't know he was holding; he was certain it had worked, but each step of the way Gerard had feared that

somehow, Nick would know, and he would stop him. But there was nothing, and everyone was safe. He felt that he could breathe again.

However, Gerard wouldn't send for Worm to come back. While he was confident this magic would protect his brother and the others, it would be foolish to rely on it solely. Mikey and Frank would be safe with Worm; he wasn't just a valet but also a body guard. They would be protected, and the others each had someone to look out for them.

But now he was exhausted, so he crawled into bed.

Gerard was dreaming, it was peaceful, he felt as though he were floating. He opened his eyes, and realized he was floating in a swimming pool. He vaguely wondered where it had come from, and also wondered if Grant had one somewhere in the house. He'd never been overly fond of them, as he was afraid of open water. But now he felt calm.

Nick was standing above him, seeming to hover and a wry smile on his face. Gerard didn't startle, he was disinclined to even move.

"Outsmarted me, I bet that's what you're thinking," said Nick. "But that little spell won't protect you."

"I didn't use it on myself," he said. Gerard didn't bother rising out of the water, Nick would do as he pleased. Likely his best to frighten Gerard, then Nick would be gone.

"Smart lad, though maybe you should," Nick replied. He was next to Gerard now, in the water, and he whispered in his ear, "Defend yourself against monsters like Morrison."

Before Gerard could protest or defend Grant, he was awake. That had been confusing, but he knew that had been Nick he was speaking with. Though he wondered, if Nick could speak with him in dreams, why bother with the letters?

Gerard realized the answer was simple. It was too easy to pass off a dream as a flight of fancy. If he hadn't read that dream sending was a common tool demons used, that's what he would have thought this time. Feeling overwhelmed, Gerard turned on his side and tried to get back to sleep. But it was no use. He tossed and turned for hours, but wasn't able to sleep.

He gave up an hour later. Gerard dressed quickly, and did just that. The manor was silent, as the other servants were gone and Quitely was downstairs. Gerard found that coffee had been made, and after enjoying a few cups, and seeing that there was a storm raging outside, decided to wander the house for a time.

So much of the manor was still a mystery, and though it was cold, he wanted to explore. As he walked the house, he had the sensation of being watched, but he ignored it. Chalking it up to either Nick or his own imagination.

Gerard found rooms with practically ancient furniture. Antique tapestries so intricate he could study them for hours. He even found a suit of armor tucked away in an alcove, along with medieval weapons. He smiled as he looked at the suit; it wasn't like others he'd seen, it was worn out and had clearly been used in battle.

It was when he was inspecting it that he heard a loud clap of thunder, making his heart leap into his throat. He'd been troubled by the wind howling, and it sounded as though the storm was getting worse. Indeed, when he went to a window and looked outside, it was raining so hard that Gerard could see the fields were flooding. But he moved on, continuing with his exploration.

There were also keepsakes and mementos that were from other countries. He knew that Grant had traveled extensively, and had apparently brought something back from each location. His favorites were a beautiful wooden cabinet from India, and a bronze statue from China.

Gerard was surprised to discover the house was much bigger than he'd originally thought. He found a tower where a telescope was set up, though it hadn't been used in a long time. Gerard also found what he could only describe as a laboratory, though it was empty of any equipment or chemicals. There were tables and vials, and Gerard did wonder what Grant would get up to in there.

Most surprising to him was what appeared to be a photography studio. There was a camera, many gas lamps and a large curtain hanging from the wall. Gerard was inspecting the camera when he heard, "It's not ready yet. It's surprisingly difficult to take pictures in a private home. I'm still working out the kinks."

"This is amazing," Gerard replied, standing up straight and turning to look at Grant. "This whole house is."

"I'm glad that you enjoy it. Come with me, I think there's something else you'll like."

Gerard followed him out of the room, and back downstairs to a wing that he hadn't visited yet. The sun was down by now, but it had been dark for hours because of the storm. He nearly tripped over his own feet in the darkness, so Grant took his arm to steady him.

At last, they seemed to have found the room Grant was looking for. For a moment, it was pitch black. But then gas lamps sprang to life, and Gerard gasped. It was a solarium, but also a sitting room. Gerard could see that there were many exotic plants, and he stepped in further. "This is beautiful."

"With the weather getting colder I thought you might enjoy this. Quiteley does most of the work, though I tend to one or two of the plants myself. It's kept very warm in here as it's good for the plants." Grant said. "There was something I wanted to discuss with you, Gerard."

"What is it? Has DiDio sent a telegram calling for my head?" Gerard had been neglecting to send any of the *Malcontents* material to London, and he was sure he'd catch hell for it any day now.

Grant chuckled. "No, not yet. The servants haven't returned due to the weather. It's too dangerous for them to attempt to return to the house when it's storming like this. Even with as good as they are out here, the roads are too treacherous. Because of this there's a problem with my... Health."

Gerard faced Grant, his expression concerned. "Are you ill?"

"No, not just yet." Grant was very close now, and he reached up to gently push Gerard's hair back from his face. "But I need to eat."

"I'm sure there's plenty of food in the pantry?" Gerard offered. It was difficult for him to keep his tone steady with Grant so close, and especially with Grant touching him. He saw that the older man had that predatory look in his eyes once again.

"I have a rather unusual diet. If you would permit me?" Grant asked, and Gerard nodded. Grant led him to a settee, holding Gerard's hand. "I wonder, how familiar are you with the supernatural?"

It took everything Gerard had to keep his face blank. "I've read about it."

“Yes, you were researching demons. Did anything else surface during your studies?”

“Quite a lot, mostly about witchcraft. Occasional fairy tales and monsters.” Grant chuckled darkly, and he said something that Gerard didn’t quite catch. “Beg pardon?”

“I was wondering if I would be considered a monster in such tales, but it hardly matters. They’re ridiculous and inaccurate.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Because I’m beating around the bush. My apologies, this is very difficult. While I don’t feel I am a monster that doesn’t change how others would see me,” Grant explained to him. He still hadn’t let go of Gerard’s hand. “Gerard, I’m in no doubt that you are well aware of there being more things in heaven and Earth, as the quote goes. And you have been hurt by such things. But not all are bad. And I am one of them.”

“You’re not a demon,” Gerard said, and he felt awful for how it sounded. Almost like an accusation.

“No, I’m not. I’m mostly like you but there are some dramatic differences.” Grant was still completely calm, but since he was still holding his hand Gerard felt as though he were trapped.

“Grant, if you don’t make yourself clear and speak plainly, I will go mad.” He was getting more and more anxious by the moment. Grant, not human? That didn’t bother him as much as it once would have. But he was afraid that whatever he was, it would have a negative impact on their relationship.

“I’m sorry,” Grant said. “I didn’t mean to frighten you. I’m a vampire.”

Gerard stared at him for a moment, but didn’t recoil or try to pull away. Finally, he asked, “A vampire? I...” He almost said that he didn’t believe it. But after everything that had happened with Nick, he wasn’t so sure. And while he’d never seen Grant feast on a person’s blood, he still didn’t doubt him. Grant seemed to be waiting for Gerard to speak, but he wasn’t sure where to start. “Why are you telling me this now?”

“Because a rather alarming situation has arisen.”

“Is this because of Nick?” Gerard asked, gulping a bit. “Because the

sigil was supposed to protect you from him! Grant, I'm so sorry."

"No, pray calm yourself. This was not your fault," Grant replied, raising an eyebrow. "However we will need to speak about Mr. DiCosimo at some point, but not now. The reason I'm telling you is that without the servants here, I have no way to feed. As they have been delayed in returning, I find myself running out of options, so I'm asking you," Grant drew in a deep breath, seeming to center himself. "Would you be willing to donate blood to me?"

Gerard frowned. "Is it going to hurt?"

"No, you would not be harmed in any way, I swear it."

"What if I say no?"

He sighed. "Then I will keep my distance until the servants return. Please understand this isn't a matter of life and death. You are under no obligation to agree."

"What what happens to you if I say no?" Gerard leaned closer and Grant turned his head so he wasn't looking directly at him.

"The same as any human who does not eat. I become weak and experience hunger pains."

"Would you die?"

"Not immediately, and I'm not in danger of that just now."

"But you could be?"

"Not for a very long time, I promise. You're upsetting yourself again."

Indeed, Gerard was gripping Grant's hand tightly and he was shaking. "I'm sorry, I'm concerned is all."

Grant sighed. "This was a mistake. I'm sorry to have trouble you when you already have so many burdens. I shall endure."

"You'll suffer is what you mean!" Gerard exclaimed hotly. "I won't let you when I could stop it!"

"I already explained you don't have to agree," said Grant, turning back towards Gerard.

"I understand that, but I do agree. I'm saying yes, Grant."

“There is an additional risk.” Grant’s eyes were dark, but with what emotion, Gerard wasn’t sure until he added, “The process can be quite pleasurable. I wouldn’t wish to offend you.”

“Like...” Gerard gulped. “Sexually pleasurable?”

“Yes, precisely.”

Gerard could feel himself blushing, but he nodded. “It’s still all right. Do you want--”

“Not just now. You should have something to eat first.”

“And after that?”

“We’re going to retire to my rooms and have a very long talk. Get some things out in the open before we continue.” Grant stood, pulling Gerard with him. “This can be an intimate act between those who share as much as we already do.”

“As you say,” Gerard replied, his heart pounding. He wasn’t afraid, as he knew Grant would never hurt him. He was more afraid of what their talk would reveal about Gerard himself. And if Grant would be able to look at him the same again.

That night, they served themselves dinner, as Quirely was nowhere to be found. This didn’t seem to concern Grant, so Gerard didn’t ask, assuming that the other man would explain later. Gerard had some trouble eating, as he was incredibly nervous. But once they retired to Grant’s rooms, it wasn’t as bad.

They were precisely what he expected. They were opulent, a bit cluttered, and an esoteric collection of the things that Grant loved. They each settled in an armchair, and Grant said, “I’m sure you’re curious and have a lot of questions. I’ll start out simple. I know many legends and stories would have you believe that vampires are monsters. But the truth is we’re not that different from humans. And we certainly aren’t insensible monsters who beg for sympathy while murdering others in a rage.”

Gerard cocked his head to the side and said, “I take it you read *Varney the Vampire*. I assume you didn’t like it.”

“Mostly for it’s crude, inconsistent and at times nonsensical storytelling. Only partially because of its inaccuracies regarding

vampires.” Grant smiled a bit. “A few things are true. We can eat food and drink though it doesn’t sustain us. We have heightened strength and senses, and yes, we have fangs. They are retractable. Some things were wrong. We’re actually quite sensitive to sunlight. It can’t kill us mind you, but it is extremely painful.”

“How painful?” Asked Gerard

“Like being stabbed all over your body with small daggers until we get out of the sun.”

“That sounds like that would kill you though!” Gerard exclaimed, and Grant chuckled.

“Perhaps if I were a younger vampire it would, but in general we keep to the night and the shadows.”

“Can you fly?” Gerard asked eagerly, making Grant laugh.

“I can’t, no. Some of the older ones can levitate, and I heard tell once of one who could teleport but that may just be a legend.” Grant’s eyes were still twinkling with humor.

“How did you end up like this? Were you born a vampire?” Gerard was leaning closer to Grant now.

“No. Born vampires are incredibly rare, and they don’t live very long, their systems are too unstable.” Grant was leaning forward now too, elbows resting on his knees as he gestured with his hands. “You see most vampires are turned into one from a human. The woman I refer to as my mother turned me; she also turned the woman I refer to as my sister.”

“Why did she turn you into a vampire?”

A fond smile came across Grant’s face. “I’m still not completely certain. I think a combination of loneliness, and to protect herself and Leigh. At the time they were two women travelling alone and they were frequently harassed. It helped them a great deal to add a man to the group.”

“Horse feathers!” Gerard yelled suddenly, throwing his hands up in frustration. “Women shouldn’t be harassed and preyed upon, especially not for travelling alone! They’re people the same as men, and they have the same desires and ambitions for happiness! That anyone would take advantage of them or view them as weaker for

being women is folly!”

Grant was surprised by the outburst, but he chuckled. “I see that you spend a great deal of time listening to Miss Cloonan’s feminist philosophies. But yes, it is folly, especially in this case as they easily slew any with ill intentions. However murdering such criminals does attract attention.” Grant sat back in his chair as he continued.

“I remembered seeing them in the tavern that night. It was in the middle of the 13th century, and I was a traveling scholar with an interest in alchemy, going home to see my father. I saw them seated at a table, and they were set upon by ruffians whom myself and the tavern over had driven off. They were weary, and I asked if there was any way that I could help them. I thought perhaps they could use a hot meal and a room for the evening. They stared at each other for a moment then said I could help them. They lured me out to the back of the building and turned me.

“It’s a complicated process, and one I’m not at liberty to divulge unless I plan on changing you. Which at this time, I have no intention of doing.”

Gerard laughed bitterly. “I doubt you would be able to change me.”

“Why? Because you’re soulless?” That made Gerard freeze, and Grant continued. “You’re not the first I’ve met, not even the tenth. Selling your soul to dark powers was something a fashion statement during the 1600s. Especially in France, in Louis XIV’s court. As you recall before her execution, La Voisin was quite popular.”

“Are you saying La Voisin was a demon?” Gerard asked. “I thought she merely sold poisons.”

“She was more a broker, her maid Margot was the demon. Regardless, what I’m saying is that it’s not uncommon.”

“I--Yes. I’m soulless,” Gerard admitted, unable to meet Grant’s eyes.

“And yet you are still a sensitive, even tempered person. Your wish must have been something to behold.” That made Gerard look up, and Grant wore a gentle smile.

“What do you mean?”

“Demons prey on those in desperate situations,” Grant pointed out. “They give the person what they want rather than what they need in

exchange for their soul. Things like riches, or power. It leads them further down a dark road until they destroy themselves. But here you are, healthy, whole, not a mark of sin on you. So I can't help but wonder what you wished for."

Gerard sighed, running his hand through his hair. "I guess it's my turn to tell the truth. Do you recall several years ago after *Celebration for Divine Retribution* debuted, it went about that I was residing in an artist's colony in France?"

"Yes," Grant nodded. "I had heard something to that effect."

"I was in fact in residence at an opium den in the East End. I was drunk often, and once my grandmother died I lost myself in the dens. It was the only thing that numbed the pain. But it didn't last, eventually the pain found me again. Drunk on gin, immersed in opium or sober as a priest, I... I couldn't bear it. I wanted to end my life, and that was when Nick came to me.

"He promised he could make life worth living again if I gave him my soul. I was desperate, and stupid. So I said yes."

"That was all you wished for?" Grant asked, sounding surprised. "A life worth living?"

"Yes. And for the pain to stop."

"Then the demon should have been more specific," replied Grant, chuckling. "He should have asked what you thought would make life worth living. Such a general request is too broad and could be interpreted in so many ways that it isn't really to his benefit."

"I thought it was the other way around? That magic had to be unrestricted?" Gerard asked.

"Not necessarily. The demon can perform the spell and bring the magic to you. It's the greater magics of this world that decide what to do from there. As he didn't directly state what to do, the magic, perhaps the universe decided how to carry out your wish. This demon is an amateur."

Gerard was quiet for a few moments, thinking back. Grant said amateur, but Nick still scared the living daylights out of him. Recalling the first dream, and Grant's role in it, he asked, "So you did come to my aid?"

“When he sent you the fever dream? Yes, I did. I’m not as skilled in the psychic arts as my sister or Vince, but I know a few tricks.”

“Vince? You mean Quitely?”

“Yes. Quitely is an alias. His real name is Vincent Deighan and he’s a dear friend. He poses as a butler when I have guests so as not to arouse suspicion.”

Gerard frowned. “Is he a vampire too?”

“No, he’s human, a rather gifted artist and clairvoyant. But he has been with me for the past century.” At Gerard’s confused look, Grant laughed. “There was a ritual so his energy is bound to mine. We performed it as an experiment and were both pleasantly surprised when it worked. So long as I’m alive he stays the same, and if I die he begins to age at a normal rate again.”

“So what is this lack of food doing to him?” Gerard asked.

“It’s making him quite fatigued, which is why I insisted that he rest tonight. And since our energy is bound, feeding from him would be pointless and likely only hurt us both. I can’t feed from him, so there’s nothing to be done.”

“Yes there is,” replied Gerard, his voice softer than usual. “Tell me how you want me so you can take my blood.”

Grant looked surprised for a moment, then said, “Hm, we have addressed all the issues I wished to speak about. Except one.” Grant was leaning forward again. “I was serious when I stated this would be intimate. Feeding from the servants is different as while I care for their well being, we aren’t close. But since you came here, and even before that, I have been drawn to you. I like to think we’re good friends.”

“I’ve told you about Nick’s true nature,” Gerard told Grant. “Not even Mikey knows about the deal I made.”

“Perhaps friends is the wrong word, as few know of my true nature as well.”

“Confidants?” Gerard suggested, and Grant nodded.

“Yes, I think that’s the perfect word.” He rose, crossed the room, and knelt next to Gerard’s chair. “I must ask once again, are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure,” he replied.

“Thank you,” Grant said, and he took Gerard’s hand in his, standing up. Gerard followed suit, and Grant led him into the other room. It was the bedroom, and Gerard was blushing again. Grant instructed Gerard to take off his shoes, waistcoat, and jacket. Gerard was glad he hadn’t bothered with a cravat or tie that evening. He felt the slightest hesitation when Grant told him to get on the bed, but he did so.

Grant sat on the edge of the bed, and took Gerard’s hand in his again. “This will sting a little at first, but it won’t be painful.” He unfastened the cuff on Gerard’s shirt, rolling the sleeve back. He kissed the delicate skin of Gerard’s inner wrist, and then he bit down.

Gerard gasped. It did sting, but it vanished nearly as quickly as it came. His eyes closed, and he felt light. Not the flooding sensation of opium or the dizziness of alcohol. This was as though he weighed nothing, and he was so warm. Gerard couldn’t keep a moan from escaping his lips, and he felt Grant’s fingers in his hair.

It felt as though Grant was wrapping his entire essence around Gerard, and in return sampling his own through Gerard’s blood. He understood now what Grant meant by intimate. It felt as though they were melting together.

All too soon, Grant pulled his mouth away, breaking the connection. He wrapped a handkerchief around Gerard’s wrist to staunch the blood flow. Gerard was gasping as the sensations slowly left him, and he wasn’t sure if he wanted to laugh or weep. Grant slipped onto the bed, and wrapped his arms around Gerard, still stroking his hair.

When Gerard had his wits about him once again, he whispered, “Mother of God.”

“Yes, it is a breathtaking experience.” Grant told him.

“It felt as though you were drinking my very heart!” He placed a hand over his chest, and chuckled. “It appears to still be beating.”

“That is good news,” his tone was teasing, and Gerard smiled. “It’s not just the blood, I’m sampling your life’s essence. Not in such an amount that it would harm you in any way, I promise you that. And in return, your own energy samples mine. It’s somewhat difficult to explain, but the encounter can be astonishing for both parties.”

“I would say it was a heady experience. Yes, I think heady suits.”

Gerard giggled. "I feel strange."

"Not content?" Grant's tone was concerned as he asked the question.

Gerard sighed in return. "Content, yes that's it. It's been so long since I felt contentment that it's a foreign concept to me. But no longer." He was curled against Grant, and they both lost themselves in thought for some time.

It was Grant who interrupted the silence. "What are you thinking about?"

"Can't you read my mind?" Gerard asked, teasing but tired.

"No, it's not one of my talents. Please, what's on your mind?"

Gerard exhaled slowly, his arms wrapping tighter around Grant, as though he were afraid the other man would disappear. "I was thinking it was foolish and naive of me to make that deal with Nick, but if I hadn't, I likely wouldn't find myself here and now. And that... For the first time in many years, I am happy."

Grant's thumb suddenly rubbed against Gerard's forehead, smoothing the worry lines between Gerard's eyebrows. "Is that all?"

"No. I was also thinking of the letters from my friends, and something Worm said before he left." Gerard sat up, his heart pounding but eyes on Grant. It wasn't like him to be so bold, but given what had transpired, there seemed to be little point in holding back. "Do you love me?"

"Yes, I do, very much." Grant was beaming at him.

"Do you intend to take me as your lover?" Gerard nearly stumbled over the word.

Grant said nothing for a moment, instead choosing to pull Gerard back down to the bed. He kissed both of Gerard's cheeks, then spoke. "Only if you'll have me. Yes, I'm different from you. But we'd be equals if we were to become lovers; I wouldn't conquer you. So the question really is, were I to ask you to be my lover, would you agree or disagree?"

It was Gerard's turn for a nonverbal response. Tentatively, he pressed his lips to Grant's. He could hear his blood rushing in his ears, and his nerves were just about to get the better of him. But he couldn't think of a better way to let Grant know his answer. Grant's fingers curled

around the back of his neck, and Gerard continued the kiss. He felt the other man's tongue tease the entrance of his mouth, and Gerard opened for him.

Gerard was still tense, and when Grant broke the kiss he asked, "What's the matter?"

"If... If we're going to do what I think, it's... I haven't, in a long time."

"Neither have I, as a matter of fact." Grant smiled at Gerard and kissed him, taking the younger man's breath away. "It will be wonderful, I'm certain."

Gerard wasn't so sure about that, but he didn't wish to argue. Instead he went back to kissing Grant. His hands shook slightly as he reached for the buttons on Grant's waist coat, and he kept going. Gerard carefully unbuttoned the garment, and slid it from Grant's body. He then went for his shirt, being as careful as he could with the delicate fabric.

The whole time, Grant watched Gerard, not touching him, but within arms reach. He watched Gerard, his eyes dark and indecipherable. It was making Gerard even more anxious, however he kept going. Once Gerard had his shirt off however, he stopped, staring.

"What happened?" He asked, tracing a large scar on Grant's stomach.

"An accident, before I was changed," Grant replied. "That I lived was a great surprise to many."

"No doubt." Gerard let his fingertips wander, from the scar up his torso. His touch was tentative, as he was still finding his footing with the other man. But when Gerard touched on his pectoral muscles, Grant sighed. Gerard smiled and did it again, watching Grant's eyes flutter closed. "Have I found a weakness?"

"Not a weakness so much as a sensitive spot," Grant replied.

"As you say." Gerard bent forward and kissed along his chest, hands still exploring his upper body. The kisses were slow and lingering, and when he looked up at Grant again, the vampire seemed to be taken aback.

"Do you like this?" Gerard asked.

"Yes. Keep going."

He did, and upon coming to one of Grant's nipples, Gerard wrapped his lips around it. He sucked lightly, and felt Grant gasp. Gerard drew his mouth away, flicking it with his tongue. Gerard did the same to his other nipple, making Grant sigh again.

Gerard explored more of Grant's torso with his mouth, finding that his fellow writer was slightly ticklish along his side. When he came to the scar, he ran his tongue along it, before kissing his way down to the top of Grant's trousers. Here, he hesitated. Grant apparently sensed this, as a moment later Gerard found himself on his back.

"I believe it's my turn," he told him. Grant wasn't quick to undress Gerard, he did so with the same pace Gerard had. But rather than because of nervousness, it was more as though he enjoyed it. However, as Gerard was already partially undressed, it didn't take long. When Gerard was topless, Grant stared.

It made him squirm, as he realized that Grant could now see the sigil burned into his side. He went to cover up, but Grant stopped him, immobilizing his arms.

"Don't be embarrassed," said Grant. "You're beautiful." To prove it, he lay his own kisses on Gerard. His lips were dry but smooth, and his kisses gentle. Grant nipped lightly at the brand on his side, and Gerard relaxed. He then shuddered when Grant came to his inner elbow, which the vampire smiled at. He ran his tongue along the crook before continuing.

When he got to Gerard's injured wrist, Grant removed the handkerchief, and kissed the wound, making Gerard gasp. Grant looked up and Gerard said, "No it's okay, it doesn't hurt. It feels good."

Grant smiled back at him and kissed it again, then slid back up Gerard's body. Grant kissed him, and then moved from his lips to his neck. Gerard trembled, feeling the pull below his waist. He was becoming more aroused, and Grant chuckled. "A weakness?" He teased, echoing Gerard's earlier words.

"Sensitive," Gerard managed to say, which won another laugh from Grant. He sucked and bit at Gerard's throat, drawing more gasps from him. He was careful not to break the skin, but Gerard knew he would have marks in the morning regardless.

At a particularly hard bite, Gerard gasped, "Grant! Please, don't tease."

"It's not a tease, I promise you," he replied, and kissed Gerard once

more. "I do believe it is time for both of us to be divested of all our clothing, so that we may enjoy each other. Don't you agree?"

"Yes." Grant pulled away, and stripped out of his trousers. Gerard did the same, only hesitating briefly. However, when Grant got up from the bed, Gerard was afraid. "Where are you going?"

Grant cradled Gerard's face with his hand, saying, "I am going to make love to you. But we don't have everything we need. I'll return in a moment." He kissed Gerard and left the room. He returned a moment later, a glass vial in his hand. Gerard recognized it immediately as oil, and his heart felt as though it would beat out of his chest.

By this time Gerard was naked, he'd slipped under the covers of the bed. The lamp light was low, and though he was excited, he found he was also scared. Grant stopped on the side of the bed, still in his trousers, and staring at Gerard.

"What?" He asked.

"I would paint your portrait, just like this. Naked and in my bed, a perfect picture."

Gerard felt for a moment he wouldn't be able to speak past the lump in his throat, but he managed to squeak out, "Thank you."

Grant placed the vial on the bedside table, undressing completely. Gerard couldn't help staring. He was indeed a well made man, and his erect cock certainly drew the eye. Grant let him look his fill, as though he were waiting for permission. Which, Gerard realized, he likely was.

So Gerard held his hand out to the other man, which Grant took. He kissed Gerard's hand before slipping into bed beside him. Their lips met, and though Gerard's anxiety was the same, he pushed it aside. He wanted this, badly. His own hardened member was evidence enough.

"Lie back," said Grant, guiding him gently to do so. Gerard trembled, and the vampire stopped. "Are you sure you wish to go through with this?"

Gerard nodded. "Yes, I'm just nervous. As I said, I haven't done this in a long time, and I fear that..." he let the sentence trail off.

"You fear I will find you boring, or unskilled, am I correct?"

"Yes."

Grant chuckled, and slid down Gerard's body, kissing right above his heart. "You won't be. I can promise you that. But this should help you relax." Grant slipped further down, and gave a soft lick to Gerard's cock, making him whimper. Grant spread his legs, hands gently rubbing Gerard's thighs. Gerard's breathing sped up, but he held himself still.

When Grant took Gerard into his mouth, Gerard cried out in surprise. It ended in a moan of pleasure. Grant was slow about it, sucking at him softly. Grant's hand gripped the base of Gerard's shaft, and moved it in time with his mouth. He kept a tortuous pace, and wasn't inclined to speed up.

Gerard's hands gripped the sheets, and when Grant moved faster, he moaned again, "God that feels so good! Please! Faster!" Grant obliged, and Gerard's legs curled in his effort to keep from thrusting his hips into Grant's mouth. The vampire didn't seem perturbed by this, and instead pinned Gerard's hips to the bed.

He was able to forget himself for a moment. The pleasure overrode him, and his nervousness vanished. Gerard felt a heat gathering in his stomach, and his thighs. He was getting close, and he gasped, "Nearly there." Which of course led to Grant pulling his mouth away. Gerard whined at that, and Grant chuckled.

"None of that, love. Hand me the oil, please," he said.

He nearly knocked it over in his haste, but he grabbed the vial and gave it to Grant. He took it, and held on to Gerard's hand as he did. He kissed his fingers and said, "This is going to take some time. When you're close, please let me know, I wouldn't want you to reach your climax too soon."

"I will," he replied.

Grant maneuvered him as he wanted, and poured some oil into his hand. He caressed Gerard's entrance, rubbing the oil into his skin. "Talk to me," Grant said. "Tell me what you're feeling."

"I... It feels nice, but it feels weird," Gerard replied.

Grant used more oil, and asked, "And now?"

"Still a little weird. I don't think I've ever had this much used on me before."

"Clearly your former lovers were inept," Grant teased. But he kept rubbing, and carefully worked a finger inside of Gerard. It took some doing, as Gerard was still nervous and as he said, it had been a long time. But Gerard relaxed himself as best he could, and when he felt the digit wriggling inside of him, he threw his head back, gasping.

"Oh my GOD!"

"No need for such language." Grant kissed him, mouth moving slowly against Gerard's. At the same time, he was carefully stimulating Gerard, shifting his finger back and forth. he asked, "Do you like that?"

"Yes," said Gerard, his eyes squeezing shut.

"Would you like more?"

"Please!"

Grant licked Gerard's neck, and whispered, "All right. Tell me if it's too much."

Gerard nodded, finding it hard to form the words. Grant used more oil, and pulled the first finger out. He attempted to push both in at the same time, but Gerard whined and shook his head. Grant stopped, and after a moment he went slower.

Gerard was panting, and he said, "I can do it now."

When both fingers were inside, Gerard bit his lip, stifling a cry. Grant sank the digits in and out of Gerard's body, generous with the oil. "Touch yourself for me," Grant ordered, and Gerard did as he said.

He would have shied away, but the way Grant was looking at him, how he was slowly stoking a fire in Gerard... There was no hesitation. Gerard licked his lips, gulping as he did. "Grant, please, I want more!"

"I'll give you more, but I don't wish to hurt you," Grant explained. He nipped at Gerard's lower lip and whispered, "Give me more time love. I want you to enjoy this as much as I know I will."

"I am! I am enjoying it but more! I need more!"

"You need to be patient," Grant told him.

"I will go mad if you don't!" Gerard cried.

"You will suffer if I do. Patience. Now move your hand, keep yourself hard for me. This won't take much longer."

Gerard groaned, but he followed Grant's advice. He stroked himself, fast enough that he was still hard, slow enough that he didn't peak too soon, but it was difficult. Grant was as cautious as ever, and wouldn't even try to fit a third finger until Gerard was trembling, tears in his eyes.

"I love it," Gerard said breathlessly. "Don't tease me anymore! I won't last."

"Will you not?" Grant asked him, still thrusting with his fingers.

His hips jerked, and Gerard whimpered. "No! Grant I beg you!"

"Then turn yourself over. It will hurt less if we start with you on your belly." Grant removed his fingers and pulled away, grabbing the oil.

"As you say." Gerard rolled himself over, and was on his hands and knees. His stomach tightened as he felt Grant move closer, heard the vial being opened again. He jumped when Grant kissed his shoulder blades.

"Remember to speak with me, and be honest if I'm hurting you. I derive my pleasure from yours," Grant said in his ear.

"Is that so?" Gerard asked, then giggled, "Is that why you were so insistent with making your path clear?"

"As a matter of fact, yes," he replied, nipping Gerard's earlobe. Grant's hands were on his hips, and both were still. This was a moment they had both wished for, dreamt of for months. Gerard wanted to savor it, and he was sure Grant wanted the same no matter how impassioned they both were.

But it passed, and Grant slowly entered Gerard.

It went easier with the extra oil, and the precautions that Grant had taken. When he was fully seated in Gerard, he exhaled slowly. "Yes," Grant hissed.

"My God!" Exclaimed Gerard. He felt full, but it wasn't painful. He felt complete. Grant peppered the back of Gerard's neck with kisses, making the younger man sigh.

"Are you ready?" He asked.

"Yes, Grant, please!"

Grant's lips were at the base of his neck now, and his hips snapped against Gerard's backside, drawing a surprised cry from him. The vampire's movements were slow, but strong, his grip on Gerard's hips solid. He dictated the pace, keeping Gerard's back thrusts controlled. And Gerard loved it.

It seemed to go on forever, until he heard a soft growl from Grant. Gerard turned his head so he could see him out of the corner of his eye. "Are you all right?" He asked.

"Perfectly fine."

"Liar. What is it you want? This isn't all about me my darling."

His fingers tangled in Gerard's hair, and Grant said, "I want to see your face."

Gerard squirmed away from Grant, and he got the hint and withdrew from the younger man. Gerard collapsed to the mattress and turned over. Grant was on him in half a second, piercing him once again. It drew a sharp intake of air from Gerard, and it made Grant grin.

"So beautiful," Grant said, kissing him. "My darling boy."

"Take me," Gerard breathed.

"Yes."

Grant lifted Gerard's hips, and drove into him. The pace was faster, more brutal, but not bruising. Gerard met each thrust, bucking himself up in return. Gerard's legs were wrapped around Grant's waist, pulling him in deeper. He touched the vampire's face, whispering, "Look at me."

Grant did, his eyes dark and gaze intense. Gerard's hands cupped his face, as though he couldn't quite believe that Grant was there. It was then that Grant brushed that spot, the one deep inside that made ardor sweep through his whole body. He wailed, and Grant howled in return. "Don't turn away," he said to Gerard. "I want to see your face."

"I won't. Oh my God, Grant!" Gerard exclaimed, and Grant kissed him, drilling into him. The heat that had been teasing and building burned

through Gerard.

"Gerard," he hissed. "I'm so close. Are you?"

"Yes."

Grant's hand went between them, fondling Gerard's cock. "I want more of you."

"What?"

He kissed Gerard and said, "Your blood." He punctuated the statement with a thrust.

Gerard writhed against him. He was so close, and he knew it would drive them both over the edge. So he kissed Grant back and whispered, "Do it."

Grant didn't hesitate, when the kiss broke his lips trailed over Gerard's cheek and down to his throat, and he bit down. Gerard's body bowed, that floating feeling taking him over immediately. It coupled with the fiery pleasure coursing through him, and Gerard couldn't hold it in anymore. He screamed as he reached his climax, clinging to Grant.

He felt for a moment as though he couldn't breathe, that his heart and mind were too full. But Grant pulled his lips away, thrusting until he reached his own completion. They were staring at each other, blood on Grant's lips and breathing harshly. But then Gerard lifted his head, trembling as he pressed a kiss to the other man's lips.

The taste of the blood didn't repulse him in the least.

Grant was murmuring to him, and he couldn't quite make out the words. Except one; "Sleep."

And as he drifted off, he whispered, "I love you."

He felt Grant smile against his lips. "And I you."

It was the best sleep that Gerard could remember. When he awakened, he felt pleasantly sore and surprisingly clean. He stretched a bit, smiling when he felt Grant's arms around him. "Good morning," Gerard whispered, and he heard Grant chuckle.

"It's still night time my love," Grant told him.

Gerard looked down at himself, then turned in Grant's arms. "Did you clean us up?"

"Yes," said Grant, brushing his hair out of his face. "You were exhausted. I thought it would be best if I did it."

"Thank you," Gerard replied, and kissed the tip of his nose. Though now that he was awake more, some of his fears from the previous night started to come back to him. He knew his eyes were wide, and maybe a bit frightened looking as he stared at Grant. He started to ask, "How was--" but he stopped himself, and couldn't continue.

Grant however, seemed to understand his meaning. "It was perfect, my love."

But it wasn't enough. Gerard was seized by an irrational fear, one that made him sit up and look down at the other man. And he asked Grant, "Are you going to banish me from your house?"

This took Grant completely unawares, and he stared at Gerard in surprise. "Dear lord, no. What on Earth would make you think that?"

"I don't know," Gerard admitted. "I didn't mean to say it."

"But you were thinking it enough that it has distressed you," Grant concluded. Grant sat up as well, and he cupped Gerard's face in both hands, saying to him, "I am not going to throw you out. I'm not in the habit of doing that to my lovers."

Gerard sighed and wrapped his arms around Grant, and Grant followed suit. "I'm sorry," Gerard whispered. "We were having a beautiful moment and I ruined it."

"It's not ruined. I have you in my arms, you're alive, we're both relatively healthy, and we had amazing sex. Which I hope to repeat soon," Grant told him, making Gerard laugh. Grant kissed Gerard's hair, then asked, "But tell me, why did you think I was going to throw you out? Has that happened to you before?"

Gerard nodded. "Yes. Once. It was a long time ago when I was young. But it still comes to mind sometimes, and Grant..." He trailed off, and Grant pulled back to look at Gerard's face. Gerard gulped and continued to speak. "Last night meant so much to me. I don't want to leave your presence ever again."

He chuckled and kissed Gerard's forehead. "I see you have a touch of poetry to you. Rest assured I won't throw you into exile unless you ask it of me, or I have good reason. Though for the life of me I can't think of a single reason that would be good enough." Grant's lips met Gerard's briefly, and the vampire whispered, "I love you, you've given yourself to me. And I'm yours."

They held each other like that for a while, but when there was a knock on the door, Gerard squeaked and hid under the covers.

"Who is it?" Grant asked.

"Quietly, sir."

"Come in."

He did, Gerard could see him but couldn't hear him from where he was hiding. He heard him chuckle and said, "I see you're feeling better, Grant."

"And I suppose we can drop the charade now that Gerard knows everything, Vince," he replied, rolling his eyes. He then gently shook Gerard's shoulder, saying, "You can come out now."

Gerard, blushing, did emerge from the sheets, though he kept most of himself covered. "Are you feeling better?" He asked, not meeting Vince's eyes.

"Much better, thank you," he replied. "So much so I've made coffee."

That did perk Gerard up, but he didn't move to get out of bed. Vince laughed and said, "It's in the drawing room when you're ready." He then looked at Grant and said, "The servants will be back around tea time."

"Thank you, Vince," Grant said. "And I'd like to add it's good to see you up and about again."

"It's good to see you looking so... Satiated," Vince replied before leaving the room.

Gerard was hiding again, and he groaned from under the blanket. "I am going to die of embarrassment."

"I assure you, that isn't possible," Grant replied, kissing the top of his head through the covers. "Come love, it's time to be up."

Gerard smiled shyly, and got out of bed. Grant was up already, and he wrapped Gerard in a dressing gown. "There you are." He kissed his lips, and mumbled, "Coffee?"

"Yes!"

The servants were indeed back by that afternoon, and if they didn't suspect about Gerard and Grant, there was little doubt as to their relationship after dinner that night. They were completely proper, but their affectionate touching wasn't missed by anyone. One of the maids even winked at Gerard, making him blush.

Thankfully, no one said anything about it. And while Gerard felt a bit guilty, he ended up neglecting his Malcontents manuscript. He would likely regret it later, but for now, he and Grant were getting to know each other. They shared everything with each other, every part of their lives no matter how insignificant. Of course, Grant had quite a bit more history than Gerard did.

One night they were curled up together on the fainting couch in Grant's rooms. Both were in their night shirts and dressing gowns, and Gerard's head was pillowed on Grant's chest. He liked the way he could hear Grant's voice rumble as he talked.

"Weren't you ever bored?" Gerard asked.

"Sometimes, yes. There were a few decades that passed so slowly it felt as though they were lasting for thousands of years. But others moved by quickly. I travelled, I wrote, I experienced many new things," Grant told him.

"What was your favorite?"

Grant smiled, his fingers combing through Gerard's hair. "I had a very strange experience in Kathmandu around the turn of the last century. I was visiting a temple, learning more about ancient mystical rites in Nepal. My kind, of course, wasn't necessarily welcome, but the monks haven't turned away a student yet."

"Was it because you were a vampire or because you're a white man?" Gerard asked, making Grant laugh.

"A little of both. But I was meditating, and something happened that still defies explanation. I did my best to address it with The Unseen, however I don't think I ever really came close."

Gerard raised his head to look at Grant. "What do you think happened?"

"I think I was taken by higher beings and shown things I can't possibly understand, being from a lower dimension," Grant said simply. "And someday, I will be able to work through it. I have time, after all. And perhaps I'll gain the knowledge I was meant to have."

"And what did the monks say when you told them what you saw?" Gerard asked.

"I completely lacked the words to describe it, and they seemed to understand. They found me at the bottom of a stone staircase, where I'd only just come to my senses. According to one monk, they hadn't been able to find me for hours." Grant was chuckling at the thought. "He was a little befuddled, but not surprised."

Gerard kissed him and said, "I wish I had a fun story like that. I haven't travelled much outside the country. A few trips to the Continent, however."

"I'm sure there's something. What was your strangest experience?" Gerard squirmed a bit, but Grant held tight to him. "Please Gerard, I would like to hear it."

"As you wish." Gerard thought about it for a bit, while Grant continued to stroke his hair. Finally, he said, "There was a time that Ray, Frank, my brother and I were staying in a chateau in the south of France. It was when we were writing our last piece together, an opera. It was difficult, we'd never tried an opera before, and so much was going into it. And we didn't know it, but the chateau was haunted."

That made Grant raise an eyebrow. "Truly?"

Gerard nodded. "Yes, though I still don't believe in ghosts, there were things we saw there that defied logical explanation. And it had a strange effect on Mikey. He became withdrawn, and melancholy... And he eventually had to leave, otherwise I believe the spirits would have driven him mad. They were really driving us all mad, but Ray managed to pull us back together."

"Really? And how did Mister Toro manage that?" The words could have been taken in a mocking fashion, but Grant's tone was completely sincere, so Gerard continued.

"One night he was playing the violin portion of Danse Macabre by

Saint Saens, and I found him in the library by himself as he did. And we realized that we were going about it all wrong," Gerard, for a moment, felt as though he were back there again, and he finished with, "But it was the strangest time of my life."

Grant tilted Gerard's face up, and drew him into a deep kiss. When the pulled apart, Grant said, "Thank you for sharing that with me."

Gerard smiled in return. "If I always receive such rewards for pouring out my heart to you, I will have to do so more often. Now, how am I to repay you for sharing yourself with me?"

"I can think of a few ways," Grant said to him, a dark look in his eyes. It made Gerard shudder with excitement.

They spent weeks learning personal histories, and learning more about each other's bodies. Grant especially took pleasure in making Gerard blush, or moan. Gerard himself particularly loved it when Grant would growl, and get a bit rough.

The weather turned colder, and the way to town was blocked because of it. Gerard managed to get a telegram out to Mikey, Frank and Worm the day before the roads were rendered completely impassable. He let them know that he was all right, and he should hear from them in the New Year. Once again he told them to stay safe. He sent a similar message to Ray, Becky, Gabriel and Fabio.

Unfortunately, Gerard had to return to the manor before he could receive their replies. Gerard, Vince, Grant, Minnie, John and Mary were stuck at the manor until spring. But there were plenty of supplies, and they were cosy. The servants were more relaxed in their duties, and for Christmas, Grant, Gerard and Vince gathered in the kitchen. It had been Vince's idea that each of them make a dish to share with the help.

"We don't stand on ceremony unless there are guests," said Grant as he prepared a curry. "Or I should say, strangers. Which you no longer are."

"So that's why we're making dinner for the staff?" Gerard asked. He was doing his best to make a crepe for dessert, but it didn't look as nice as he thought it would. It smelled all right, but it was a strange color and a bit flakey.

"It's something we like to do sometimes," Vince told Gerard. Gerard wasn't sure what he was making, but it smelled wonderful.

"I think it's a fantastic idea, and something more employers should do," Gerard replied. "After all, they are paid for their service but they are quite under appreciated at times."

"Yes," Grant responded. "I quite agree. And it gives us a chance to introduce them to a few new things."

Gerard sighed, looking down at his dessert. "I'm not sure this is going to be much of an experience for them. My grandmother could make these very well, and she taught me. But it doesn't look anything like hers."

Vince reached over and tried a piece of the crepe, then said, "You're too hard on yourself, this is quite good." Grant sampled it as well and smiled.

He kissed Gerard's hair and then told him, "It's delicious. It's not pretty, true, but the taste is perfect."

"Thank you!" Gerard said, hoping the servants would enjoy it.

He needn't have worried, as at dinner that night, everyone brought something and a good time was had by all. Some of the dishes looked questionable, but were wonderful when he sampled them. There was plenty of food, wine for the servants and towards the end of the night, Gerard felt closer to everyone.

Gerard found himself laughing at some crude jokes the maids knew, while Vince had a discussion about artwork with the groundskeeper. And then there was Grant, a cat in his lap and observing the dinner party with fond eyes. He looked happy, and it made Gerard's stomach flutter.

And as time went on, Gerard began to feel more like his old self. Before the drugs and the demon deal. Nick had left him in peace, and wasn't threatening his loved ones anymore. Actually, Gerard hadn't heard or felt anything from Nick since winter had set in, and it made Gerard much more optimistic. He felt fearless and completely at ease. He was finally at home in his own skin, and Grant was as gentle and loving as ever. Gerard never wanted to leave the manor.

But of course, they couldn't linger in their romantic state forever. When they woke up one evening after dusk, Grant sighed and said, "I

feel we should return to our studies, darling. We do have deadlines. And I'm sure once the way to town is clear again, we'll need to send off copies of our manuscripts."

Gerard sighed, pouting at Grant. "How long do we have?"

"Not much longer now. Three weeks perhaps." Grant smiled and kissed Gerard's forehead.

Gerard groaned. "I am never going to be able to finish the *Malcontents*!"

"Nonsense," Grant admonished. "You're going to finish on time, just the same as myself. We'll help each other."

After they'd eaten dinner, Grant and Gerard excused themselves to the library. They were to pick up where they left off, as neither had gotten much work done the previous nights. But it was difficult for Gerard to concentrate. He kept looking over at Grant, hunched over his desk and writing, so completely focused on what he was doing.

Gerard couldn't concentrate at all. And he felt just a little bit mischievous, even bold. So he put down his pen, and carefully set his papers aside. He got up as quietly as he could, and went over to Grant.

Placing his hands on Grant's shoulders, he asked, "Are you making any progress?"

"Not as much as I would like," Grant replied, though he didn't stop writing. "And yourself?"

"None at all. I find myself distracted by a handsome man."

Grant chuckled. "Is that so? Perhaps he should move to another room."

"Perhaps he should stay right where he is, so I can do what I like with him." It still made his stomach jump, this boldness. But he was enjoying it. And Grant seemed to as well.

"Indeed," Grant replied, then put his own pen down and leaned into Gerard's touch. "And what did you have in mind?"

"Stay where you are," said Gerard. His hands slid down Grant's arms, and Gerard kissed his neck.

"I needn't move? What are you planning?"

"You'll see."

Gerard circled around Grant, until he was standing on the other side of his desk. He smiled, and sank to his knees. Crawling under the desk, his hands easily found Grant again. Gerard heard a sharp intake of breath as he opened Grant's trousers. Gerard was glad to see that Grant hadn't bothered with undergarments.

Due to the angle of the desk, Gerard knew that Grant couldn't see him. Which he was grateful for, as he wasn't sure he could go through with this audacious act. Though Grant certainly wasn't complaining as Gerard drew the other man's cock out. Grant was half hard, and Gerard slowly stroked him.

He could hear Grant groaning, and it made Gerard grin. He was doing that, he was making him feel good. Grant was fully hard now, and Gerard licked the head of his shaft. Grant opened his legs wider, and Gerard didn't need any more of an invitation than that.

Gerard's mouth enveloped Grant's cock, and he felt Grant shudder. Gerard worked his mouth around Grant's flesh, slow and curious. He listened to the sounds Grant made, and held onto his thighs. He paid special attention to both, so he could determine what Grant liked and what he didn't like.

He bobbed his head, keeping his movements languid. Gerard alternated between a gentle suckling and a hard draw, and Grant's appreciative groan rang in his ears. When he felt Grant's thighs tremble, that was when he sped up his movements.

"Yes," Grant moaned softly, his fingers sinking into Gerard's hair. Gerard echoed it, and it vibrated down Grant's shaft. Gerard was getting hard, and when Grant started to talk it aroused him further.

"Such a wicked, talented mouth. I should have known. Ngh... Clever boy, you're a quick study aren't you?" Grant gasped, and he gripped Gerard's hair tighter. "Yes, yes keep going! So close!"

Gerard smiled around Grant's member, and did as he was told. It was no surprise when Grant thrust up to meet his mouth, and Gerard tasted his seed. He lapped up all he could, and slipped out from under the desk.

Grant was breathing hard, and he said, "Come up here." Gerard smiled and after closing Grant's trousers again, sat in his lap. Grant kissed him hard, and then sighed against his lips. "That was amazing."

"Mmm... Was it? You might have said so." Gerard said playfully, but gasped when Grant's hand cupped his own erection.

"Would you like me to return the favor?" Grant whispered into his ear.

"Just your hand," Gerard told him.

"As you wish."

It wasn't slow, but it felt so good when Grant had his hands on him. He deftly slipped his hand into Gerard's trousers with no preamble, and Grant began stroking him. He kept his movements gentle, but swift. Grant had his hands in Gerard's hair again and he said, "Look at me."

He did as Grant asked, and Gerard stifled a cry. Grant's eyes were trained on him, dark and intense. Grant watched the pleasure slowly take over, and it didn't escape Gerard's attention that Grant looked pleased with himself.

Gerard clung to Grant, wrapping his arms around him and burying his face in Grant's neck. "Please, please, please..." He whimpered, over and over. Gerard dug his nails into Grant's back and screamed when he hit his climax. Gerard went limp in Grant's arms, and Grant chuckled.

"Do you think you can concentrate now?" He asked. Gerard could hear a strange noise, and when he turned his head, he saw Grant sucking Gerard's release from his fingers.

"Not if you keep doing that," Gerard replied breathlessly.

"And if I made it worth your while?"

Gerard raised an eyebrow. "How?"

"Telling would spoil the surprise." Grant gave Gerard's backside a quick slap, then said, "Go on, back to your desk."

Gerard giggled, and did what Grant said.

It was almost February when Gerard finished. Grant had finished his manuscript a week beforehand, and was more than willing to act as a sounding board for Gerard. It was late, nearly four in the morning, when Gerard set his pen down and leaned back in his chair. He let out

a breath he hadn't known he was holding and said, "I've done it."

Grant was in a chair by the fire, reading. When he heard what Gerard said, he looked up and asked, "Done what, my love?" He put his book down, and stood.

Gerard grinned and jumped out of his chair, running to Grant and throwing his arms around him. "I've done it! I've finished the *Malcontents*!"

Grant caught him easily, and laughed in delight. "I'm so proud of you, Gerard." He kissed him, and then whispered in his ear, "I think this calls for a celebration, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," Gerard whispered. His eyes closed, and he tilted his head to give Grant access. "Bite me again?"

"Is that all you want? This is quite the achievement, I think you're entitled to three requests." Grant nipped at Gerard's throat, making him shiver.

"Three?" He smirked. "My my, three wishes, I shall have to think--AH!" Gerard gasped when Grant sucked at his pulse point. He broke away so that he could focus for a moment, but then he smiled. "I think I know what I would like to do, Grant."

"Do you?" Grant asked. His arms encircled Gerard, and he pressed closer.

"Yes, I've noticed the bathing vessel in your rooms is quite large," Gerard said, smiling up at him. "Perhaps large enough for two?"

Grant grinned back at him, and pulled Gerard into a searing kiss. Gerard bit at his lips and Grant said, "I believe you are a genius, darling."

"Shall I meet you in your quarters?"

"Yes."

Gerard went back to his own rooms, grinning. He didn't use them much anymore except to change clothes. He vaguely entertained the idea of moving his things into Grant's rooms, but he wouldn't presume to ask. After all, Gerard wasn't even sure if this would last into the Spring. It was something he wanted to talk to Grant about tonight.

He stripped naked, but wrapped himself in a dressing robe. He didn't meet anyone on his way to Grant's rooms, which didn't surprise him. He was pretty sure the others were all in bed. Gerard was starting to suspect that Minnie was spending most of her nights in Mary and John's bed. She'd seen them leaving their quarters more than once adjusting her clothes. It made him smile, maybe love was in the air.

Gerard let himself into Grant's parlor, and made his way to the bathroom. Grant was already there, the water running and the man himself already nude. Gerard slipped up behind him, and kissed his back. Grant chuckled and asked, "What took you so long?"

"I was thinking," Gerard replied. Grant turned around, and Gerard was momentarily distracted. He was an arresting sight from the front, and Gerard wanted to drink him in. But Grant's hands cupped Gerard's face, bringing him back to reality.

"And what were you thinking about?" Grant asked.

"I feel safe here," replied Gerard, looking into Grant's eyes. "And I want to stay with you."

Grant kissed him, and then said, "I would love that. But we'll need to address it at a different time."

"Why?" Gerard asked, slightly hurt.

"Because it's been like our own little world here this winter. If you feel the same when we both move back to town in the spring, then I would be delighted to have you," Grant replied. He stroked his thumbs across Gerard's cheekbones and added, "I don't want you to devote your entire life to me."

"But what if I want to?" Gerard asked.

"As I said, I will be happy to have you," Grant replied, kissing him again. "But I want you to be sure."

Gerard sighed. He knew that Grant was right, but that didn't mean that he liked it. And it wasn't as though he could hide forever. Eventually he would have to return to London and see his brother and his friends. "How much longer do we have here?" He asked.

"I don't leave for London until the end of March, you're more than welcome to stay until then," Grant told him. The tub was full now, and Grant reached over and turned off the water. "Are you ready?"

"Yes," Gerard said. He pushed his fears aside for now, and enjoy this time with his lover. Grant smiled, and opened Gerard's robe. Gerard let it fall to the ground, and Grant smiled at him. He led Gerard to the bathtub, a monstrous thing. It was one of the new fangled ones that was made of glazed porcelain, and could likely fit three people. However, it was only the two of them.

Grant slipped into the water first, then once he was settled, he waited for Gerard to join him. Gerard smiled and ran his hands through the water, saying, "Oh, that's quite warm."

"Not unpleasantly so, I hope?" Grant asked.

"Not at all." Gerard carefully got into the tub, settling on the opposite side from Grant. He sighed as the warm water enveloped him. "This feels nice."

"Yes, I was rather taken with they hydrotherapy movement," Grant said to him, smirking. "So this is your second wish, what's your third?"

Gerard giggled. He pretended to think about it, and then said, "Hm. You know what? I think for my third wish... I want you."

Grant grinned at that, and moved closer. "I think that can be arranged." Gerard crooked his legs up and spread them, so that Grant could settle on top of him. He kissed Gerard, and he groaned into Grant's mouth.

They kissed for ages, and Gerard's hand strayed beneath the water. He gripped Grant's cock and started stroking, and Grant sighed. "Using your clever hands on me again?" Grant asked.

"Yes," Gerard replied. He loved the way that Grant made him feel, but what Gerard liked more was what he could do to Grant.

However, Grant seemed to have ideas of his own. He drew Gerard's hand away, and then pinned his wrists to the sides of the tub. Grant smirked, drawing him into another kiss as he thrust their hips together.

Gerard gasped, the sound echoed by Grant. "That's it," Grant whispered to him. "Feels good, doesn't it?"

"Yes," Gerard replied, their cocks rubbing together. The warm water surged between the two, and Gerard could hear it splashing on the ground. Grant didn't seem to pay it any mind, and neither did Gerard.

All he wanted was for this to never end.

Grant still had him pinned down, and was controlling the pace. It aroused Gerard further; he liked being under Grant's control, loved to be held down like this. But he wanted a say as well, which was why he said, "Harder."

Grant nodded, and picked up his pace. Their shafts rubbed together, and Gerard pushed his hips up to meet Grant with every stroke. He was panting, and his hands clenched into fists. Grant relaxed his grip on his wrists, and Gerard used his newfound freedom to wrap his arms around Grant's waist.

His hands ran down to Grant's buttocks, and Gerard squeezed. Grant growled, and attacked Gerard's neck with his lips. He sucked hard, and made Gerard cry out. They were both close, and Gerard groaned, "Grant, please. Please!"

Grant bit down, Gerard's blood flooding into his mouth. And that was enough for Gerard, he screamed as his release hit him. Grant continued to feed, and shuddered with his own climax. Grant pulled his mouth away, licking and sucking at the wound.

"Oh my God," said Gerard, shivering.

"Delightful," Grant whispered, and kissed Gerard. He could taste his own blood in Grant's mouth, and it excited him.

The weather started to warm up a bit in February, and Grant and Gerard had spent much of their time together. Though Gerard knew he should probably begin to ready his things so they could return to London. He knew he was dragging his feet on it, but he couldn't help himself.

He was going to miss the manor, and everyone who resided there. He wouldn't see Minnie, John or Mary in town as Grant preferred his solitude there. Vince had made it clear that once Grant was settled back in town, he would be going to the Continent. Gerard had wondered how Grant would eat, and Vince had laughed and said, "He finds plenty to feed from in town. Believe me."

It just so happened, there was a day when Gerard woke early, and couldn't get back to sleep no matter how hard he tried. So he kissed

Grant's temple, and slipped out of his rooms. It was getting close to sunset, and Gerard thought a walk around the grounds would do him some good. He still hadn't brought himself around to packing, but Gerard had made some progress. He'd sent his manuscript in with Grant's when the roads had cleared, which had pleased Mr. Lee and Mr. DiDio greatly.

Gerard was just thinking on the telegram he'd received from them when he heard something odd. He turned, and saw there was a carriage coming up the road. They weren't expecting anyone. Grant had been clear on that, they didn't receive visitors at all, they were quite far off the beaten track. "Perhaps they're lost," Gerard muttered.

But the carriage turned onto the road before the manor, and Gerard went to meet it. He was surprised when, of all people, Ray stepped out. Gerard gasped, then grinned and said, "Mr. Toro! It is a surprise to see you here!"

Ray was smiling, and also appeared to be relieved. "Mr. Way! I am pleased to see you! I worried when we didn't hear from you when the frost broke."

Gerard suddenly felt foolish. "Oh, I... I'm so sorry Ray, I've thrown myself into my work."

Ray raised an eyebrow. "Have you?"

Gerard looked sheepish, and he said, "Let me help you with your bags?"

"I'm not staying long," Ray replied. It was true, Ray had only brought a valise and a small suitcase. It looked as though Ray had packed light, and packed quickly. He couldn't figure out why his friend had been in such a hurry.

Gerard helped him get them inside, and once the coachman was compensated, they were alone. Gerard smiled, and then said, "I'll have to let V-- er, Quiteley know you've arrived. Did you want some coffee?"

"Certainly. It has been a long journey," said Ray. He then pulled Gerard into a hug. It was against protocol, and completely unlike Ray. He was a social tutor after all, so for him to do this, it was unprecedented. Gerard hugged back as Ray told him, "We were so worried." He could feel his friend shaking, and Gerard immediately felt guilty. Now he understood. Ray must have panicked when Gerard didn't get back into contact, and set out to find him. It was so... Ray.

"Everything's all right, Ray, I promise," Gerard replied, squeezing his friend back. "And we'll have a nice long talk about it once I get the coffee. All right?"

"Of course," Ray replied, and let him go.

"The parlor's just through there. Most everyone's asleep right now so I'll see if I can rouse Quiteley, won't be long," Gerard told him. Once Ray was in the parlor, Gerard sprinted upstairs and knocked on Vince's door.

"Gerard? What's wrong?" Vince asked, raising an eyebrow.

"A friend of mine showed up unexpectedly from London and I think he's gonna stay for a few days so we have to act normal," Gerard said, all in one breath.

Vince sighed. "I'll tell the servants. Can you tell Grant?"

"Yes of course." And Gerard went to Grant's room. The sun was going down, and he was up and in his dressing robe. Gerard quickly explained about Ray, and Grant nodded.

"He's more than welcome to stay, Gerard," said Grant. "What I need to know, do you want to tell him about this?" He took Gerard's hand and squeezed it as he asked.

Gerard smiled. "Yes. Ray knows about Frank and Mikey, he has no aversion to those who are attracted to the same gender."

"Then I'll leave you to tell him, and I'll be down shortly." Grant kissed him, then gave a playful smack to Gerard's bottom.

"Ah! Oh you terror! All right, I'll see you downstairs." When he got back to the parlor, he was pleased to see that Ray's luggage had been taken upstairs, and he was seated and enjoying a cup of coffee. Minnie curtsied and left the room, but tossed a wink to Gerard as she did.

Gerard joined Ray and said, "Grant will be down soon."

"Grant? Not Mr. Morrison?" Ray asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Well, you see, ah..." Gerard sighed. "All right, it's time I confessed. During our confinement here we've grown close."

"Gerard, please don't tell me that you've struck up a romance with one of the most notorious members of literary society that London has

ever seen," groaned Ray.

Gerard winced and said, "Er, just a small one?"

"Oh Gerard, I warned you to be careful." Ray set his cup down and added, "I hope he's at least being good to you."

"He is, he really is Ray. He's been a delight and I think if you gave him a chance you'd like him." Gerard enthused, and that was when he heard steps out in the hall.

Gerard looked up when Grant came in, and was pleased to see he'd selected one of his best suits. Gerard smiled at him, and Grant smiled back before approaching. Both Ray and Gerard stood up, and Ray extended his hand for Grant to shake, saying, "Mr. Morrison, pleased to meet your acquaintance at long last."

"Pleasure to meet you as well, Mr. Toro," said Grant, and he shook hands with Ray. But, suddenly, a strange look crossed Grant's face. Ray looked afraid. Gerard wasn't sure what to make of it, but then he cried out in surprise.

Grant was thrown across the room, as though he were a rag doll. When Grant tried to stand, he was tossed into a wall. Gerard rushed forward to help, but Grant held up a hand and said, "No, wait!" Gerard was feet away when Grant was hurled upwards, and appeared to be pinned to the ceiling.

Gerard couldn't fathom what was causing this. But he could feel something tickling the back of his neck. He remembered the feeling from when Nick was up to his tricks. Gerard looked around for the source, and then it hit him. He went to Ray, who was staring up at Grant in horror, and he shook his friend's arm.

"Ray, stop this!" Gerard said.

"I haven't--" He started to say, but Gerard cut him off.

"It could only be you, stop!"

"I don't know how!" Ray shouted, turning to Gerard. But that was enough. Grant fell from the ceiling, and Gerard went to his side immediately.

Grant was panting, and Gerard caressed his face. "Grant?"

"Yes, I... Dear lord what was that?" Grant asked.

Gerard looked over at Ray, who was staring at his hands as though he'd never seen them before. Gerard didn't think he'd ever seen Ray turn so pale in the entire time that he'd known him.

"If you don't know, no one does," Gerard said.

Hours later, Vince was looking Ray over. Gerard had explained everything, and in truth, it felt good to tell Ray. He told him about the demon deal, that Grant is a vampire, why Mikey was really in hiding and why Gerard was out in the wilds of Scotland.

"Are you well?" Gerard asked.

"I'm astounded," said Ray.

"Yes, I know it's a lot to take in."

"Not really." Ray shook his head. "How did I not realize one of my best friends had made a deal with a demon?"

Gerard's jaw dropped. "Are you serious?!"

"Of course I'm serious!" Ray growled in frustration. "I've read every book there is on demons and demonology and I had no idea! Gerard I'm so sorry, if I'd have realized sooner I could have helped!"

"Wait a minute, why's a school teacher reading up on demons?" Vince asked. He looked both confused and intrigued. Gerard didn't blame him, this was a completely different side to Ray that he'd never seen before.

"My family has an extensive library on them. Used to be a tradition to hunt them, but there aren't many left in England, and the ones in London are harmless. We've fallen out of practice. I don't think there's been a demon hunter for at least four generations." At the startled looks from Vince and Gerard, he said sheepishly, "It's just a hobby."

"A useful hobby," said Grant. He was sitting in the corner of the library, going through his own books. "I imagine you have many of the same volumes that I do, Mr. Toro." His tone wasn't icy, but it wasn't as warm as Grant normally would have been. It was polite rather than friendly, and it made Gerard frown.

"Perhaps." Ray didn't dare approach after what had happened, and he couldn't look Grant in the face. They'd found out the hard way that just started it all over again, so it was best that Ray didn't look at him at all.

"Hm, demon hunters with an extensive library in England, with a Spanish last name..." said Vince, clearly thinking out loud. "I don't suppose your lot originated in Spain by any chance?"

"No, we're Portuguese. My father is a minor noble. Ancient blood line but practically a pauper, not to mention the youngest of four brothers so there was no title."

"So he married an English heiress?" Vince asked.

"Yes, and he liked England so much they settled here rather than in Portugal."

"And where is your family originally from?"

"Caminha. It's close to the ocean and the Spanish border."

Vince nodded and went over to where Grant was, pulling down a book. Grant, Gerard and Ray all watched him as he flipped through its pages. Finally, he seemed to locate what he was looking for. "Here we are. Mr. Toro I'm afraid I'll need a sample of your blood to confirm something, but I believe I have it."

"My blood?" Ray asked, turning pale once again.

"What for?" Gerard inquired.

"Some demon hunting families have little... Quirks. I know a spell that should confirm whether or not that applies here but I would need Mr. Toro's blood," Vince explained to them both.

"I'm not sure that's safe." Ray eyed Grant as he said it.

"I'm not after your blood, Mr. Toro," Grant replied. "You see, the problem is that unexpected psychic powers in humans, especially ones like that, can indicate there's a problem with that human."

"Such as?" Gerard asked.

Vince shrugged. "Demonic possession, a haunting, a curse, all of which can prove to be lethal to humans. It's why we need to check. However if my theory is correct, there's nothing wrong with Mr. Toro."

"What's the theory?" Asked Ray.

Vince handed him the book and said, "Some demon hunters develop powers in order to track their prey. Gives them an upper hand in killing something that can snap their necks with a thought. Your family might have been one of those."

"But as you pointed out," said Grant. "There hasn't been a demon hunter in your family in generations, so it might have lain dormant until you shook hands with me."

Ray was white as a sheet, but he was reading the entry that Vince had shown him. Finally, he said, "So why do you need my blood?"

"The method of how those families received those powers in the first place is easy enough to detect with a spell that I know. I would need a drop of your blood so we can see whether or not I'm right."

"And if you're wrong?"

"We keep searching for an answer. There's actually some pretty nice creatures out there your kind label monsters, and we'd like for you to not go off killing them accidentally."

Ray sighed at that, and Gerard squeezed his shoulder, offering him comfort. But finally, Ray said, "Okay, I'll do it. How much do you need?"

"A spot, that's all. Gerard, would you fetch me a clean piece of paper, please?"

"Certainly," he said. Gerard went to get the paper from his own desk, but stopped by Grant first and asked, "How are you feeling?"

"Like every bone in my body was broken and set on fire." Grant did look tired, but there was a small smile on his face. "But I'll be keeping it to myself. Your Mr. Toro seems to be the sensitive sort."

Gerard nodded. "He doesn't like hurting people. He's probably mortified that he did that to you."

"Of that I have no doubt. Though I must admit, he is taking this amazingly well."

That made Gerard pause. "You really think so?"

"Absolutely. After all, he hasn't fainted. Or at least not yet." Grant

squeezed Gerard's hand, then added, "Go help Vince. I'm sure that Mr. Toro would like to have you with him. This is, after all, a strange new environment for him."

Gerard wanted to kiss Grant, or pull him into a hug. But, mindful of the others in the room, he didn't. Instead he went to Vince and handed him the paper. Vince had apparently acquired the blood when Gerard was talking to Grant, and Ray had a handkerchief around his finger to stop the blood flow.

Vince took the pin that held the drop of blood, and stabbed it through the center of the paper. He then took a pen and drew a sigil around the hole. Once he seemed to be satisfied, he said, "I need you two to stand back."

Gerard gently pulled Ray away, as Vince muttered something to himself. They were both surprised when the paper suddenly turned to ash and then vanished. "What just happened?" Gerard asked.

"I was proven right," said Vince. "Mr. Toro here does have a special power, one that only a demon hunter or their kin could have. I'd say probably body control, seeing how he threw Grant around like that."

"I don't know what that means," said Ray.

"It means," Grant said, standing up, "You have the ability to control the body of any preternatural creature, and make that body do what you please. You could stop our blood in our veins or make our brains into soup with one touch and enough concentration."

Ray looked close to fainting. "But I didn't mean for this to happen!"

"I am sorry Mr. Toro, but it has happened. The only question now is, what will you do now that you have this gift?" Grant was standing closer, and Gerard wasn't sure if he should step between him and Ray.

"I don't want it, I want to get rid of it!"

"That's not possible," Vince said, trying to use his calmest tone. "Once that power has been activated, it's there, permanently. So it will always be a part of you. I can train you how to use it, but you'd be stuck here for a while."

"You said it only affects preternatural creatures, correct?" Ray asked.

"Yes, but there are many of them running about London in the

disguise of a normal human being. And many are quite harmless. You would be hurting innocent people," Grant concluded.

That seemed to have swayed Ray, and he sighed. "How long would it take me to gain control?"

"That all depends on you, and how good of a student you are." Vince said to him. "But it would be safest for you to learn here at the manor."

"It would give us a chance to catch up!" Gerard enthused. "And... We could talk. About how I'm going to break all of this to Mikey and Frank."

Ray couldn't help laughing at that. "Oh Gerard..." He took in a deep breath, let it out, then nodded. "All right. I'll agree to the training. I don't want to hurt anyone."

"That's the spirit. Now let's get you unpacked," said Vince.

It took a few days for Ray to settle in. He sent telegrams to his brothers asking for things he would need from home, and instructing them to cancel all his social engagements and classes. Ray sent letters personally to his clients, letting them know that due to illness he was indisposed, and would reschedule as soon as possible.

Gerard hardly saw him at first, Ray spent most of his time with Vince, learning to control his power. Gerard had seen Vince after their sessions a few times and seen him with flowers growing out of his head, or on one memorable occasion, with purple skin.

Finally, he and Ray had tea together one afternoon. Ray still looked tense, but not as much as when he'd first arrived.

"How are the lessons going?" Gerard asked.

"As well as can be expected," said Ray. "Thankfully, Mr. Quitely is very patient."

Gerard smiled a bit, then said, "It's because you're afraid of hurting him, isn't it?"

Ray sighed and nodded. "Yes. But there is progress, I'm not throwing Mr. Morrison around the manor, for a start." He fixed Gerard with a

piercing look, then asked, "What of you and our host?"

"Oh... Everything is fine," said Gerard, but he was blushing as he said it.

"I don't want any details of your exploits," Ray said, "but I'm asking because Mikey isn't here to. Are you sure you are happy with him?"

"Yes, as I've said, I'm happier than I have been in ages." Gerard raised an eyebrow. "Why do you ask?"

"I worry that because of the isolation..." Ray started, but Gerard stopped him.

"I know what you're hinting at. And Grant has the same concern. We'll see what happens when we all return to town."

"At least he's sensible." Ray continued to speak, but suddenly, Gerard wasn't hearing him. He felt strange, as though he were submerged in water. He couldn't breathe, and he felt himself falling.

He could hear Nick's voice, and he was whispering to Gerard. He couldn't quite make out the words, but he could hear the menace in them. Gerard flailed; he'd never learned to swim, and now he was thrashing about in the water, with no hope of reaching the surface.

His lungs were on fire, Gerard needed to break the surface if he were to live. But he couldn't see, the water seemed to go on forever no matter how long he lashed out. His heart was beating in his ears, the water was rushing around him, and he could bear it no longer. He opened his mouth, and felt water flooding his throat, his lungs...

Nick's voice was growing louder, and now Gerard could understand. It was the same thing over and over. "I hope you've enjoyed your worthy life," Nick said, "because now it's over."

When Gerard came back to his senses, he was on the floor of the parlor, his clothes wet and his chest in terrible pain. Someone had their hands on his chest, and was pressing down. He coughed, and felt water come up. Finally, Gerard's vision cleared, and he could see again.

Grant, Vince and Ray were standing over him, each looking more surprised than the last. Grant pulled Gerard into his arms, hugging him tight. "Are you all right?" He demanded.

Gerard coughed again, and clung to Grant. "Yes, yes I'm fine. But what happened?"

Grant pulled away as Ray spoke. "You became very quiet, and then you were surrounded by water. Your eyes turned completely black. I called for Mr. Quitely and Mr. Morrison and they were able to help you."

"That was a powerful spell," said Vince. "It wasn't fatal, but I don't imagine being drowned repeatedly is pleasant."

Grant was still watching Gerard like a hawk, and he asked, "Was it Mr. DiCosimo?"

He nodded, and then shivered. "Nick said... He said that he hoped I had enjoyed my worthy life, because it was over."

Grant and Vince exchanged looks, and then Grant said, "Come Gerard, let's get you upstairs and get you warmed up." He said to Vince, "I'd appreciate it if you would set wards up around the house, so that hopefully this doesn't happen again. Mr. Toro, if you could assist Vince, I would appreciate it."

"I'll help him," Ray promised, and he and Vince left the room.

Grant rang for the servants, and instructed John and Minnie to get a fire going and get Gerard's rooms ready for him for the night. He asked Mary to make up a tray for Gerard, and Grant said, "He'll be dining in his room tonight." They scattered about their tasks, and Grant escorted Gerard upstairs.

Once Gerard was dry and in his bedclothes, he took Grant's hand. "Please don't leave."

Grant smiled a bit, and kissed his temple. He got Gerard tucked into bed, and when Mary delivered dinner (a fine beef stew with bread), Grant served Gerard himself. Gerard couldn't eat much, and he asked, "Why is he doing this now?"

"Nick?" Grant asked, then sighed. "I believe he's growing impatient. Demons aren't known for playing a long game. How long has he owned your soul, Gerard?"

"Six years."

"And you are the picture of health. Likely, he has seen our time

together and your happiness as fulfillment of the contract, and now feels he can torment you as he pleases," Grant replied. He stroked Gerard's hair and added, "But we'll stop him. We may not be able to break your contract with him, but we can keep him from doing something like this again."

Gerard frowned. "But he threatened my brother! What if--" Grant held a hand up to silence him.

"We've thought of that, and we are taking measures to protect your brother and Mr. Iero." Grant took Gerard's hand, kissing the knuckles. He then turned Gerard's hand over, and Grant kissed his palm. "Have faith, Gerard. We have had dealings with demons before."

Gerard did have faith, but it didn't stop him from being scared. He pulled Grant in for a kiss, then said quietly, "I love you."

"And you know I love you, my heart is yours," Grant promised. He kissed Gerard back, and then snuffed out the candle.

Gerard woke later that night. Grant was no longer in the room, but someone had been in to stoke the fire and feed it, so it was as bright and warm as when he'd drifted off. Gerard got out of bed and pulled on his dressing gown and slippers.

He went downstairs, and was surprised to find Ray and Grant, side by side in the library. They were reading, and Gerard wasn't sure that he wanted to interrupt. He kept by one of the larger bookshelves, so he could see but not be seen. Ray closed one of the books and sighed, rubbing his eyes with his hand. "I've found nothing."

"We must keep looking," Grant replied.

"These deals are notoriously tricky," Ray pointed out. "And we don't know what sort of demon this is that Gerard has on his hands."

Grant looked over at Ray, seeming to consider him for a moment. Then he spoke. "It's advantageous, and it has the ability to completely control a human body without possessing it. That's the only way it could have driven off his addiction and done that little trick with the water this evening."

"You call that a little trick?" Ray asked, disbelief clear in his voice.

"I do. It's something Vince could do if he were so inclined. Which, thankfully, he isn't." Grant then asked Ray, "Have you ever met Mr. DiCosimo?"

Ray shook his head. "No. Gerard only mentioned him once, and he refused to tell us anything other than that he had helped with his addiction, but that it was costly."

"Hm..." Grant then looked up and said, "Gerard, if you would come in here please. We have some questions that we need answered."

Gerard was blushing as he entered the room. "I didn't think you would see me."

"I didn't, but I could both hear and smell you," Grant explained, chuckling a little. "Mr. Toro and I would like to interview you about this demon, to narrow down what sort it is."

"Are there many different sorts?" Gerard asked, sitting down across from them at the table.

"Hundreds," Ray said. "Mr. Morrison is right, we need more information."

"Pray relax yourself," said Grant, and he offered Gerard a smile.

"The first thing we need to know, is there anything about this demon that would set him apart from a human?" Ray asked.

Gerard shook his head. "No, he's quite normal looking. Even handsome."

"Tell us how you met him," said Grant.

Ray had taken out a few pieces of paper and a pen, and was writing as Gerard talked. About how he'd met Nick in the opium den, and woken up the next morning in the demon's home on Cleveland Street. "And one of the boys that worked for him took me upstairs."

"And you say he owned the bordello?" Ray asked, still writing.

"Yes. It's not the only one that caters to such tastes on that street, but it is rather understated and you wouldn't guess... I suppose it doesn't matter now." Gerard was blushing again, thinking of what he'd seen there.

Grant leaned closer to Gerard and ask, "Did he know? Of your

predisposition?"

Gerard shook his head. "I don't think so. I believe it was a coincidence. He did try to encourage me to take one of his boys to my bed. But without the addiction, without the pain... I wasn't interested. I wanted someone to love, not to indulge in carnal lust." That made Grant smile again, and take Gerard's hand. "Though, it is troubling... Do I have Nick to thank for this? For you?"

"Not in the least," Grant said. "Demons cannot make people fall in love, as it isn't in their nature. They wouldn't know any more about love than you would know about blood lust. I'm certain that Mr. DiCosimo is simply taking advantage of the situation."

Ray was still writing furiously, and occasionally crossing things out. He grabbed one of the books from Grant's pile, and was flipping through its pages, looking for something. He then looked at the other two and said, "I will need to speak with Mr. Quiteley."

"Have you found something Mr. Toro?" Grant asked, and Ray handed him the book he was reading from. Grant looked, then gave the book to Gerard.

The Cambion is the half human, half demon offspring of the incubus or succubus. They are often born of a human man and a succubus, but may also be born of a human woman and an incubus, though this is rare. Unlike most demons, their appearance is not grotesque, and they look to be perfectly normal. They are easily identified as they prefer to be surrounded by the vice that begat them.

They can have a variety of abilities, and once they have reached a mature age will become full fledged demons with a fearsome amount of power. Maturation can take between ten months and ten years, and often takes place away from the prying eyes of humans. While powerful, they still will pursue even more power.

In order to gain it, some prefer to take after the incubus or succubus, while others will seek to make themselves more powerful through the collection of souls by other methods. Often this is done through pacts, deception, and even thievery. They are tenacious, and will not stop until they have what they want.

To defeat them, the body must be completely destroyed, and the powers absorbed, lest the creature remake itself and start over again. A cunning witch or wizard is needed for this, but beware. Absorbing such power can destroy whatever vessel it is funneled into, and the Cambion will resurrect

itself, with the powers of the vessel infused in it.

Gerard looked up at Ray and Grant, then asked, "How would Vince be able to help?"

"He is a powerful wizard, he might have some ideas for a vessel to contain whatever powers that Mr. DiCosimo has. I would prefer a vessel that can't think for itself, but I'm not certain if that's possible," said Ray. "If you'll excuse me." And he left the library.

Grant was a little surprised, and he asked, "Does Mr. Toro always act in such a manner?"

"He's not usually rude if that's what you mean," Gerard informed him. "But it looks as though he has a plan, he won't be easy to distract."

"What do you mean?"

Gerard laughed. "Oh, I forgot, you wouldn't know. We like to call him the Man with a Plan. It was beneficial when all of us were writing together." He sighed and went to Grant, curling up into his side.

Grant tangled his fingers in Gerard's hair and said, "You know, my love, I believe we should prepare to return to town."

Gerard looked up at him, slightly horrified. "But, Nick..."

"Can get to you easily from almost anywhere," said Grant in return. "And if we were to return to town we would have more help. Your friends could keep an eye on you when I can't, until we can stop Mr. DiCosimo."

He felt as though he were ready to cry. "Please, I don't want to go back, I like it here."

"I know." Grant sighed, and kissed the top of Gerard's head. "I promise, we will keep you safe. And once we've dealt with the demon, you will be free to go where you like."

"What if where I like is wherever you are?" Gerard asked.

That made Grant grin, and he said, "Then I would be delighted, and consider myself quite lucky."

They kissed, and Gerard said, "I think we should retire."

"I think that would be wise."

It was another two weeks before they returned to town. Gerard had sent a telegram to Mikey and Frank, asking them to meet them in London. Both were happy to join him, and Mikey wrote back immediately.

I'll be so pleased to see you, I have so much to tell you, things I cannot include here. I've heard that you have someone new in your life. Will I perchance meet them in town? We sail on the 20th from Calais, we'll see you when you return home. PS. A miracle has occurred.

That made Gerard smile, though he did wonder what Mikey meant by that. If it worked out, Mikey and Frank would be home before him. It was almost a nuisance to pack everything back up again, but with Ray and Vince's help it didn't take long at all. Gerard was nervous, especially as they would be travelling at night and the country roads were not forgiving.

But Grant was there, and held him through most of the ride to the train. That itself seemed to go by amazingly quick, and in the early evening hours on the second day, they were back in London. Ray headed for his own residence, and Vince and Grant to theirs.

"Are you sure?" Grant asked as Gerard headed up the steps.

"Yes, I'm sure. Mikey should be home now and I'll have to talk to him before tomorrow." Indeed, the house lights were on, and Gerard could see someone moving in the parlor.

"As you wish." Grant squeezed his hand, then added, "I will call on you tomorrow." And with that, he got in the cab he was sharing with Vince, and they left.

Gerard smiled as he went, then signed and went up the stairs. Though most of his things had been delivered the previous day, he still had a valise on him. He let himself into the house, then closed the door after. "Mikey?" He called as he put his bag down. He knew he'd seen someone in the parlor, but he wasn't getting a response from his brother.

He walked into the parlor to see if he was there, and was greeted by a most unwelcome sight. Nick was seated in an arm chair, as comfortable as he'd been invited. He had a book open, and was carefully turning the pages. He then looked up at Gerard, and smiled.

"Did you enjoy your stay in the country?" Nick asked, putting the book aside.

"What are you doing in my house?" Gerard asked, freezing in place.

"I'm here to speak with you," the demon replied, rising to his feet. "To offer you a new deal."

"Why?" Gerard asked. He was afraid, but as far as he knew, he was alone. And where the hell were Mikey and Frank?

"Because I have something you may be interested in, and I'm so very tired of waiting." Nick was close to Gerard now, and gently caressed his face. "I've wanted the full power of your soul for a very long time. I was more than willing to wait, but now that you've made these new friends, fallen in love? It'll be ages."

"Why me?" He couldn't help it. Nick had been increasingly fixated on him for a while, and he couldn't figure it out. It wasn't as though Gerard was the only musician and writer to have problems with drugs. It was, in fact, quite common.

Nick smiled, grabbing Gerard by his shoulder and pulling him closer. "So many reasons, they'd turn your head. Your beauty, your talent. But, especially? Your purity." Nick had a hold of Gerard's hair and pulled, making Gerard cry out in pain. "Your soul is untouched by evil, and uncorrupted by the church. So much potential I could turn that into."

He shoved Gerard so hard he knocked him to the ground. Nick leaned over Gerard and continued to speak. "I have some bad news for you. Your brother had a relapse in Italy. He nearly died. And Mr. Iero and I happened to run into each other. He begged me for my help, and I was more than willing to give it to him."

"You didn't," Gerard said, sitting up.

"I did. Your brother's soul is mine now." Nick knelt by Gerard, and said, "But not for long. If you do what I say." A piece of parchment appeared in Nick's hand, and he waved it in front of Gerard's face. "Now this is his contract. And I'll tear it up and let little Mikey go on with his life. If you do what I say?"

Gerard's heart was in his throat. Why did Mikey have to travel the same path he did? Was this the miracle he spoke of? He knew Mikey would likely consider it such, but without thinking about the

consequences. This was his worst nightmare, and he'd do anything to fix it. He knew what Grant, Vince and Ray would say, but he couldn't think about that. All he could think about was Mikey. "What do you want me to do?"

"Simple enough, really. I want you to end your life."

Gerard's eyes widened. "What?"

"You heard me perfectly well." Nick was grinning now. "Kill yourself, and your brother is free. You have two hours to decide. Oh, and if you try to renege this time, or bring this to the vampire and his pet sorcerer... Deal's off, I'll keep your brother's soul."

Between one blink and the next, Nick was gone.

Gerard spent what he knew to be the last hours of his life writing letters. He couldn't possibly think of doing this terrible thing without explaining himself to those he loved. He wrote a confession to his brother and Frank, about everything he'd kept from them regarding Nick and selling his soul. How he'd fallen in love with Grant, and now his life was over.

He made copies for Becky, Worm, and the twins, feeling they should know as well. For Vince, he thanked him for his kindness, and asked that his best wishes be passed on to the staff at the manor. To Ray, he wrote a long overdue formal apology, and that he wished him all the best.

Gerard was at a loss as to what to tell Grant. Mere words couldn't convey the depth of his love. So instead, he put a parcel together. His portfolio of watercolors, his gramophone cylinder collection, and a note that simply said, "I'm sorry. I will always love you."

Lastly, he made out his will. His estate, what little there was, was to be divided among Mikey, Frank, and Ray, with monetary gifts to Worm, Gabriel, Fabio, and Becky. He made sure to add, "Any mementoes are to be distributed as seen fit by Michael Way and Grant Morrison."

Satisfied that he had covered everything, he went to fetch his coat. Gerard had contemplated how he would end his life many times, and it always filled him with dread, no matter how much he thought it

would be a relief. But now, he felt a calm come over him. His heart still ached for his loved ones, but this was the right thing to do.

He managed to hail a cab, and went to Cleveland Street. Though still calm, his feet felt like lead as he ascended the steps. He was show to Nick's office right away, and the man himself was practically lounging behind his desk.

"Ah, Gerard. I take it you've made your decision, then," Nick said, all bright smiles and cheer.

"Yes," he replied. His tongue felt thick, and he could feel tears pricking at his eyes. "Tear up his contract, release Mikey's soul, and I'll do it."

Nick got up, grinning. "That's what I want to hear." He went to the secretary desk in the corner, opening it. Inside was the contract, and a beautifully shining orb. It looked like a captive star. Nick removed the items, and then took out a curved dagger.

Nick placed everything on the desk, then said, "Take the knife, put it to your throat. When you've drawn it across your neck, I'll do what you ask."

Gerard shook his head. "No. Tear up the contract and release his soul first."

"Don't you trust me?" Nick asked, grinning. When Gerard didn't move, Nick sighed. "As you wish." He snapped his fingers, and the contract burst into flame. At the same time, the orb dissolved into mist, then vanished.

Gerard was trembling as he reached for the dagger. It felt cold, and he wished that he could see Grant. He was about to bring it to his throat, when there was a sudden noise from outside. He paused, and looked to the door just as it burst open. Grant, Ray, and Frank were there.

"For the love of hell, do it already!" Nick hissed at him.

No one moved; all eyes were on Gerard. One last figure appeared, and Gerard's breath stilled in his lungs. Mikey stepped out, and his eyes widened in horror. "Gee, what are you doing?"

"I..." Gerard looked at each on in turn, and he saw fear, but also love. He dropped the dagger as tears fell from his eyes, and he whispered, "I can't, I'm sorry."

Before anyone could react, Nick scooped up the dagger, and slit Gerard's throat, whispering into his ear, "I won't be denice, not this time Gerard Way."

Gerard stood for a moment, and thought, 'This isn't what I expected.' But when he felt blood flowing down his chest, he looked down. It was thick and dark, and that was when the pain hit him. He wanted to scream, but no sound would come out. He felt himself falling, but he didn't care. All he felt was pain.

But that was quickly being replaced by numbness, and cold. He could barely see, and Gerard knew that he was dying. Grant's face appeared, and Gerard managed a smile. As last sights went, this was wonderful. Then his vision went black, and he knew no more.

When he opened his eyes again, it was day time. Gerard gasped, the soft light making his eyes burn. He heard muttering, and the light dimmed, much to his relief. "Gerard?" A gentle voice asked, and slowly he opened his eyes again. It WAS Grant, and Gerard couldn't help it as a sob escaped him.

"Please, don't tell me he killed you too," Gerard whimpered.

"I'm very much alive," Grant assured him. "And so are you."

Gerard sat up, hands going to his throat. There was no wound there, and he looked at Grant in confusion. "What is the meaning of this?" They were in Gerard's rooms at his townhouse, and he was becoming more confused by the minute. Everything looked the same. Gerard managed to climb out of bed, and went to a mirror on the wall. He was pale, even more so than the nightshirt he wore. But he did appear to be completely healthy.

A wave of dizziness came over him, and Grant helped Gerard back to his bed. "Careful, Gerard. You're still healing." He got Gerard settled back in the bed, and then repositioned himself so that Grant could wrap an arm around his shoulders. "I must ask that you do your best to stay calm."

"Where's Nick? Is my brother okay?" Gerard ask, feeling panic come over him.

"Your brother is perfectly well, he's downstairs with Mr. Iero. And Mr.

DiCosimo is dead."

Gerard stared at him, hardly able to believe it. "Are you sure?"

"I'm quite certain. Mr. Toro and Vince were very thorough, and Mr. Iero and Mr. Michael even helped," said Grant.

"I am trying to believe you," Gerard said to him, but it was difficult.

"As you likely don't know, Mr. DiCosimo tricked you. Mr. Michael and Mr. Iero were delayed arriving home because of a storm in the English Channel. Mr. DiCosimo took advantage of the delay and fabricated the story of purchasing your brother's soul. It was time sensitive, as he knew they would return shortly."

"So he told me I had to decide in two hours," Gerard concluded. "But how did you find me?"

Grant smiled a bit at that. "Vince had a vision that you were in danger. Mr. Toro and I returned to your home, but found you had already left. Your brother and Mr. Iero had arrived, mere minutes after you had left. They found the letters you'd left, and were understandably distressed. We guessed you had gone to the house on Cleveland Street, and thankfully found ourselves to be correct.

"It was difficult to gain entry to the house, as there were several guards, not to mention magical wards. But we had Vince on our side, and he was able to destroy the wards before we arrived. He chose to remain outside to be sure there were no more surprises."

"What about the guards?" Gerard asked.

Here, Grant smirked. "I'm not unskilled in the martial arts. And I'm quite certain Mr. Iero has been in several tavern brawls if his actions were anything to go by." Gerard couldn't help but laugh, and Grant continued. "We fought our way upstairs, and found you." He squeezed Gerard's hand. "I have never been more terrified in my life as when he drew that blade across your throat."

"I still don't understand how I am alive," Gerard said, squeezing Grant's hand in return.

"When he did that, he broke the contract and your soul was free to be yours again. If he hadn't lost his head due to rage, he would have realized precisely how foolish that was. But in the meantime, Mr. Toro was able to think quickly and paralyze Mr. DiCosimo. He and Mr. Iero

were able to neutralize him until Vince came inside.

"I went to your side, I could see plainly that you were dying. I did the only thing I could think of."

And the penny dropped. Gerard said, "You changed me."

"I gave you enough of my blood that it would keep you alive until I could perform the full ritual. I admit, I did have ambitions to keep you with me, but this wasn't quite how I planned it."

Grant looked remorseful, and Gerard kissed his cheek. "You saved my life."

"I've changed it irrevocably without your permission. But, I hope you will feel it's a change for the better. In time."

"I thought you didn't like vampires with melancholic remorse?" Gerard teased, which startled a laugh out of Grant. Gerard looked at his hands, expecting to see something different. A little disappointing, but he was just the same as he always was. He felt the same as well, and he said so to Grant.

"As I said, there is little to distinguish us from humans, aside from our diets and longevity." He kissed Gerard's hair and asked, "Are you hungry?"

Gerard shook his head. "No. But finish the rest of the story. How did Ray and Vince destroy Nick?"

"The vessel for his powers was surprisingly easy to find. Though it was a split minute decision," Grant told him. "As he practically volunteered. I don't think Mr. Michael has quite forgiven him yet."

"What do you mean?" Gerard asked.

"Mr. Iero has taken on Mr. DiCosimo's powers. While yes, a non sentient vessel would have been best, he was readily available and willing to help. And as your brother was assisting me with you, he couldn't ask to be the vessel. For reasons that haven't been revealed to me, Vince and Mr. Toro agreed to use Mr. Iero."

At that, Gerard looked at Grant in horror. "Does this mean that Frank is a demon now?"

"No, merely that he possess the powers of one," Grant answered easily.

"He's all right, Gerard. He and Mr. Toro have been testing his powers for some time now."

Gerard frowned. "How long was I unconscious?"

"Nearly a week. I'm sure that your brother has nearly worn the carpet through in the parlor, but I did ask to be allowed to speak with you before he did, so I could explain things."

"I wasn't... I won't hurt Mikey, will I?" Gerard asked.

Grant shook his head. "No, you won't harm your brother. I promise you Gerard, we are not mindless ravenous beasts. But I will stay with you if it makes you feel better."

"Yes please. At least at first," said Gerard. He wasn't feeling particularly murderous, but he wasn't sure if that would change when Mikey came in the room. "I'd like to see him now. Please."

Grant gently kissed Gerard's forehead, and left the room. It wasn't long before the door opened again, and Mikey entered the room. Upon seeing his brother, Gerard burst into tears. After all the worry and suffering, Mikey was there, whole and unharmed. Mikey went to his side immediately, and pulled him into a hug.

"My God," Mikey said, squeezing him. "I thought we'd lost you."

Gerard managed to pull himself together, and he looked at Mikey and said, "I'm so sorry." He looked at Grant, who was standing by the door, and nodded. Grant, understanding he wanted privacy, left the room once again and closed the door behind him.

For a few minutes, the brothers simply held each other. But once Gerard had stopped weeping, Mikey pinched his arm and said, "I should box your ears! You scared Frank and I practically to death!"

"Ouch!" Gerard rubbed his arm, but didn't protest. He likely deserved worse, and he was aware of it. "I had to keep it from you. If I'd told you that I'd sold my soul, you' have carted me off to Bedlam!"

"I absolutely would not!" Mikey retorted. "Pete tells me constantly about his reincarnation and the lives he's lived in the past. And I believe him. You'll notice I haven't sent him away!"

"Pete said what?" Gerard asked, frowning.

"That's not important right now. I can't believe you kept this from us!" Mikey sighed, shaking his head. "Though I am glad that you are well."

"I am very sorry, and I know i should have told you sooner," Gerard admitted. "But I thought at best you would both think me mad, and at worst that you would think me a monster and send me away."

"I would never think such of you," Mikey told him. "Even if you were a wretched creature that dined on infants and bathed in virgin blood, you would still be my brother and I would love you."

Gerard laughed bitterly. "I suppose that's true now."

"I've spoken with Grant," said Mikey, frowning at his brother. "He has said you needn't kill anyone."

"If what I will feel when I drink blood for the first time is even half as pleasurable as what I felt when Grant fed from me, I may trade one addiction for another."

"I did not need to know that," Mikey said, a sour look on his face. "Grant won't let that happen, and neither will Frank and I."

"How is Frank?" Gerard asked. "Grant said that he received Nick's powers."

"He did, and it's had a rather interesting effect," said Mikey. He smirked and continued. "It seems the spell has bound Ray and Frank together, much like Mr. Morrison and Mr. Deighan."

Gerard's eyes widened with surprise. "Truly?"

"Yes. Sorcery comes naturally to Ray, and now Frank is his pet demon."

"Frank is a demon?! Grant told me he'd only received Nick's powers!"

"Don't worry, he isn't actually a demon," said Mikey. "But the demonic powers, while his to use, are really under Ray's control since he defeated Nick in the first place. I think. It was difficult to understand. But they're both immortal now, in the sense that Mr. Morrison, Mr. Deighan, and you are."

Gerard stared at Mikey, the realization hitting him. "So you're the only mortal left of our weary band."

"Yes. Though that can be changed." Mikey chuckled a bit. "Mr.

Morrison offered to change me as he changed you. But I would prefer to remain human for the time being."

"Might I ask why?" Gerard asked.

"With all the magic and monsters I feel it would be for the good of all to keep some human perspective. While I'm sure that Ray would excel at that, I would prefer to perform this task." A small smile graced Mikey's face. "And besides, I would finally get to be older than you."

Gerard laughed at that, and pulled Mikey into another embrace. "So be it. But don't complain to me of gout and back pain."

"I wouldn't dream of it," Mikey replied.

One year later

Gerard was seated at his desk, scribbling away, when he heard a commotion from the front hall. He looked up as Frank and Mikey came in, both grinning. They had clearly been out, their hair mussed by the breeze that Gerard could hear. It was a beautiful night, but Gerard had elected to stay in. He had a new manuscript to work on.

"What has you two so happy?" He asked, raising an eyebrow at the pair.

"A parcel's just arrived," Mikey replied. "It's for you."

"Oh? And where is it?" Gerard asked, setting his pen aside.

"The courier insisted he deliver it to you personally," Frank said. He looked as though he would burst out laughing any moment.

Gerard stood, sighing. "Very well."

The door opened again, but instead of a shabby boy like he expected, it was Grant. Gerard crossed the room, and threw his arms around Grant. "My love! I'm so pleased to see you!"

Frank and Mikey excused themselves from the room, though Gerard hardly noticed. He knew he was behaving inappropriately, but he had so missed Grant. They kissed briefly, but then Grant pulled away a bit, saying, "I do have a parcel for you, as a matter of fact."

"Oh? Is it a present?" Gerard teased. "You have been gone for a long time."

"You were the one who came back early," Grant reminded him.

"I very well couldn't finish my new manuscript with you around." Gerard laughed. It was such a change from the previous year, when he'd been afraid to leave Grant's side. Indeed even after Nick's demise, he would tag along with his lover almost everywhere. It had caused a few whispers around town, but then Ray had quietly floated a rumor of a personal loss, and Grant taking Gerard on as a sort of apprentice.

They owed a lot to Ray. If it weren't for his power, and his incredible ability to plan everything to the last detail, the incident at Cleveland Street could have gotten them all killed. But he'd already gathered everything for the spell, and Vince had been impressed with his aptitude for sorcery. Ray's precision made him particularly excellent at potion making, something that Vince had never had in depth skill with.

While Ray learned everything he could from Vince, Mikey and Frank had their own studies to attend to. Frank had a whole host of abilities from immortality and imperviousness to harm to levitation and mild mind control. Frank was more amused than horrified, though thankfully, he didn't take these new powers lightly. Mikey was helping Frank test and control them, and also doing research to be certain his lover wouldn't be harmed.

Gerard hadn't known any of this, at least not at first. He was learning about his own condition, which was brand new to him. He had spent months with Grant, the two locked in loving embraces, and studying Grant's body. But it was a completely different situation when it came to him. And while he was relieved that he wasn't attacking people at random or suffering from an inhuman thirst, it was still something he needed to adjust to.

The truth was, even a year later, Gerard was still adjusting. Sometimes he would find himself in the parlor when Mikey called him before he even blinked. Other times, he'd be distracted by a sound, only to realize it was the heartbeat of a cat outside. Grant assured him it would get easier, and Gerard hoped he was correct.

It was part of why, when Grant retreated to the manor up in Scotland, Gerard had elected to only stay for part of the season. Mikey, Frank, and Ray had all come along. It was the four of them now, as Gerard

hadn't felt right about keeping Worm on when things had changed so much. Ray referred him to Becky's establishment at the Demeter Club, and Worm was much happier there. They kept in touch through letters, and Gerard preferred having him as a friend.

Gerard had never really been cut out to have a butler, anyway.

When they returned to the manor, John, Mary, and Minnie were thrilled to see them. Gerard learned that, indeed, they knew full well what Grant and Vince were, and now what Gerard was too. Ray's and Frank's powers they took in stride, and were kind to Mikey upon realizing that he was completely human. One day, the three disappeared with Mikey, and didn't come back until almost midnight.

When Gerard asked about it, Mikey smiled a bit and said, "They were giving me some tips about living with the immortals." Gerard smiled back and hugged his brother.

They stayed on until Christmas, but went back to England as soon as the ground thawed. Grant wanted to stay on, but Gerard missed the city, and it was a challenge for himself. He loved Grant, more than almost anything in his life. But he didn't want to be completely dependent on him. Which was why he had to go back to London. He wanted to prove to himself he could live on his own, find his own donors, and not have to rely on Grant for everything.

When Gerard had explained, Grant had smiled and pulled him into a hug, kissing both his cheeks and saying, "I'm very proud of you, my darling."

And now Grant had returned, and was hiding something behind his back. "What have you got there?" Gerard asked him.

Grant chuckled, and handed Gerard a brown wrapped parcel. "Something that I'm sure you didn't think you'd see."

Gerard's eyes widened, and he ripped the brown paper off. And there it was, a beautiful leather bound copy of *The Malcontents*. The interior picture of the girl surrounded by her four warrior friends was just as Gerard had pictured, and sketched for Becky who did the drawing herself. "It's beautiful," Gerard said.

"I am glad you like it, though I have to admit this copy isn't yours." Grant took out a pen with a flourish, adding, "This one is mine, and I was hoping for a personal inscription from the author."

"Were you? I think that could be arranged." Gerard went to the desk, opening to the first available blank page. He scribbled in it, then gently blew on the ink until it dried. He handed it back to Grant and said, "There you are."

"Why thank you." Grant turned to the page, and when he saw what Gerard had written, he laughed and read aloud, "To my dearest love, Grant. I affix my signature to this in the hopes he will stop with this foolishness and ravage me, as we haven't seen each other in months - Gerard Way." Gerard was grinning up at him, and Grant closed the book and said, "As you wish."

They embraced, and Gerard sighed as they kissed. He had what he wanted all along. A life worth living.

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